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THE OUTLAW BROTHERS; or, THE CAPTIVE OF THE HARPES.

A TALE OF EARLY KENTUCKY.

BY JOHN J. MARSHALL.



The Outlaw Brothers;

OR,

The Captive of the Harpes.

A TALE OF EARLY KENTUCKY.

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CHAPTER I.

COON'S TAVERN.

A NIGHT of wind and rain closed down upon a wayside tavern, which stood close to the road in one of the northern counties of Kentucky—a stormy night, such as sometimes ushers in the frosts and bleakness of autumn. The house was a log structure, a single story in height, and was backed by a primeval forest. The fire which snapped and roared in the large fireplace of the bar-room lighted up that apartment with a ruddy cheerfulness which made the sound of the rain dashing against the small windows, and of the wind whistling about the corners of the house, add to the sense of warmth and comfort within. Several travelers were weather-bound at the tavern; and their numbers had been added to, just at dark, by the arrival of a party of hunters, who had been out on a regular hunting expedition, camping out for several previous nights in the boundless forests which overspread that portion of the country. Their traps and accouterments littered up the place, never very tidy; a heap of skins, the trophies of their success, were piled in a corner, and their rifles stacked in another. They had made a bountiful supper from the game with which they had furnished the landlady, with the addition of corn-pone and coffee, and now they returned from the kitchen in boisterous spirits, and joined the four or five others who lounged about the bar-room hearth.

The hunters were a rough-looking set, unshorn, unshaven, with flannel shirts, deer-skin leggings, and knives glittering in their leather belts. One of them was a man nearly sixty years of age, larger than any other person in the room, rugged as a rock, with an eye like blue fire, and iron-gray hair, which lay heavily about his powerful neck and shoulders. Any one, looking at him for the first time, would be sure to give him a second glance. He was addressed by his companions as Hickory, or, more frequently, Hick.

Three or four of the travelers appeared to be very common people, two of them teamsters returning from Maysville; but one of the group attracted much silent curiosity by his unlikeness to all the rest of the company. He was a well-dressed man of about twenty-five, wearing a fine blue broadcloth overcoat, which he had not yet removed, although the great fire made the room entirely comfortable. He had a ruddy complexion, rather wiry form, and very light hair, which gave him a boyish appearance. He had already stated, in answer to various questions—which, according to the etiquette of the place, had been addressed to him—that he hailed from Connecticut, that his name was Smith, and that he was traveling partly for his health, and also as a land-agent.

The company soon became exceedingly merry; one or two soiled packs of cards were produced, while the corn-juice of old Bourbon circulated freely—this being the “native element” of all human animals in that part of the country. Some played, but the larger part got to telling stories. It was a capital night for stories; no yarn could sound exaggerated when the storm was making so much noise and bluster outside. If the hunters or the other wayfarers suspected that Coon's tavern was a hard place, and that some of their companions were hard cases, why, each was well armed and accustomed to looking out for number one; while the sense of lawlessness, even of danger, added to the excitement and enjoyment of the hour. The trees of the vast wilderness bent and creaked above the roof, and the light of the fire flared out against the branches which scratched the dismal little window-panes.

The down-east gentleman, in his fine clothes, made himself one of the talking party, perhaps from having the good sense not to hold himself aloof in a crowd of rough, suspicious men, but to do in Bourbon as the Bourbons did. He listened with profound interest to outrageous tales, generally of some unheard-of exploit, in which the teller was the hero of his own narrative. He never doubted, where it was not safe to doubt, nor failed to express admiration in the right place, so that his entertainers began to conceive a favorable opinion of him, and to

overcome their prejudices against his broad-cloth.

One of the teamsters told of an accident which had happened to him, with a runaway horse, which was so incredible that the whole company were obliged to strengthen their faith with another “bracer” of corn-juice all around.

“That was partly considerable of a ride,” remarked a hunter in the right-hand corner of the chimney, who had been poking the fire reflectively during the teamster's narrative, “but it don't quite ekal my trip to New Orleans last fall, my friend. Did I ever tell you about that, boys? Didn't I was out on a fishin' excursion, you see—I generally fishes awhile in the fall afore I settles down for the winter. I had my own boat, a small affair, jist big enough for me, my traps, and the fish I expected to catch. I'd been out a day or two, spreadin' around Mill Creek, near the mouth, and hadn't cotched much more'n served for my own fodder. I begun to get provoked, and concluded I'd run out into the Ohio, and see if it wouldn't change the luck. It was a cloudy day, tip-top for fishin', and about three o'clock in the afternoon, as nigh as I could judge, without my old silver turnip, which I'd lost to Joe Frisbie the last time we played seven-up—about three o'clock, then, I fixed about half a pound of fresh meat onto a stout pot-hook which I kept for catfish. Catfish is known to sometimes grow to an enormous size in the Ohio. Mill Creek, p'raps you know, empties into the Ohio, above Maysville. It was jist at the mouth of Mill Creek that I threw out my bait, and gettin' ruther sleepy, settin' in the sun with nuthin' to do but wait for a bite—which wasn't by no means as plenty as 'skeeters in August—and was jist dreamin' that I'd beat Joe at Brag, and got back my turnip, when I was woke up by bein' jerked almost out of the boat. 'It's a big feller's got hold of the hook this-time,' says I to myself, tryin' to haul in the line—but, blast me, if I could pull an inch. I worried about five minutes, without makin' any headway, when I suddenly discovered that I was a-going down the river at a rate which made the trees on the shore seem to be runnin' t'other way, like a big green snake. Wal, I didn't mind it for awhile; I ruther enjoyed the ride. But when I found I was passin' Cincinnati, I begun to think I was gettin' too fur away from home—'twould take too much time to get back again. 'He must be about tired out by this time,' says I, pullin' with all my might and main; but my pullin' didn't set us back a bit. We was going *tre-mendous*. I begun to git my dander up. I wasn't goin' to cave in to a catfish. 'I'll take that feller back with me, if he don't bring up for an hour yit,' says I, as it begun to get towards night. I could 'a' cut the line, but I hadn't no notion of lettin' him go, arter the trouble he'd made me. My dander was up. So was that catfish's. I wonder they don't make use of 'em on the canaw's, instid of horseflesh. We passed everything on the river. I reckon I astonished the navigators some. You see, they couldn't tell, to save their gizzards, what it was made my boat go along at that thunderin' rate. I wasn't a-rowin'—I hadn't no oars—I hadn't no sails—I jist shot past everything, like a streak of chain lightnin'. I'm bound to say there's lots of fellers on the Ohio and Mississipp, will sw'ar they've seen the devil out in his pleasure-boat. Things got out o' the way for me! When they see me a-comin', without no visible means of propulsion, them flat-boats and vessels scud to one side purty quick. 'Hallo, ther, what's up?' 'Who be you?' 'Whar yer gwine?' they yelled arter me, but afore I could answer, tell me I'm fibbin' if ther wouldn't be three miles between me and my words, so's I couldn't put an answer together. We went it all night. My ha'r stuck out straight behind, and my clo'es was mostly flyin' in ribbons with the wind we made, agwine so fast. It was *ex-hor-bi-tant*. As it was getting daylight we passed Memphis. About that time I was willin' to cave. 'See here, old feller,' said I, taking out my knife to cut the line, 'I guess you've 'arned your freedom—let's part friends'; and, reaching over to cut the line, tell me I *pre-vari-ate*, if it wasn't stretched so taut that it curled up the edge of the knife, like a cabbage-leaf. I couldn't make no more impression on it than if 'twas a lightnin'-rod—which I ruther reckon it *wur*—about that time! I begun to feel ser'us. The catfish wasn't the least bit tired. I knew we should reach New Orleans ag'inst night, and if he didn't give out afore that, the ocean was afore us, and what my fate might be I shuddered to think. I had a ringin' in my ears, and *numerous* unpleasant sensations. Wal, about sunset I saw New Orleans in the distance, and I braced myself for a chance

for life. The river was chock full of craft, and how that fish steered his course without runnin' afoul of any of 'em, I never could see. I knew now that he was makin' for the Gulf of Mexico, straight as a string. As I said, I braced myself. I stood up, keepin' a sharp eye ahead, and as we cum up opposite a favorable spot on the levee, I jumped. I lighted right in a crowd of surprised people. 'Blast that catfish,' said I, lookin' around for my boat, which was disappearin' down the mouth of the Mississipp, 'ef I'd 'a' known he was goin' to take me so fur away from home, I'd 'a' put on my t'other suit of clo'es.' Wal, my friends, I had to work my passage back on a flatboat, and never got home till the first of November. Since then, I'm resolved not to fish no more. Catfish makes too fast a team."

"Is that incident *true*?" asked the down-easter, in the blue overcoat.

"Stranger," answered the narrator, impressively, "do you see how thin my ha'r is? It was mostly blowed out by the wind, durin' that trip to New Orleans!"

The stranger directed his attention to the hair, with evident interest.

"It is rather thin," he said. "All I'm surprised at is, that you wasn't blowed back as fast as the boat went forward, so that when it reached the Gulf of Mexico, you'd have brought up standing, against the North Pole."

"Stranger," said the teller of the fish-story, "will you try a leetle of this corn-juice? It's a better article than they make in your country."

While they were attending to this important duty, a bush-ranger, who had cast several ill-natured glances at the blue overcoat, remarked:

"I thrashed one of them set-up fellers as travels around in broadcloth, last summer. He insulted me, and I whipped him."

"How did he insult you, Johnny?" queried several.

"Wal, there was a lot of us travelin' together in the stage-coach to Maysville. I went by stage, 'cos I had business, and was in a hurry. We stopped to a tavern to get dinner. One of the passengers was a fixed-up chap, from down East. He talked free enough, but after dinner, as we was standin' about the door, waitin' for the horses to be put to the stage, he got a glass of water to the pump, and brushed his teeth, with a fixin' that he had made a-purpose. You know our free-and-easy ways, out West. Folks ain't afraid neither to lend nor borrow. I'd never seen a tooth-brush afore, and I thought I'd like to try it, to see how it went. So I asked him if he wouldn't oblige me by lending it to me a minit—and, blast the stingy, stuck-up scamp, if he wasn't too mean to lend it. I didn't care a red cent for his old tooth-brush, but I *did* for his meanness; and I cut a hickory switch from a tree near by, and licked it out of him."

"Stranger," said the blue overcoat, quietly, "'twas a friend of mine refused you the use of his tooth-brush. I heard him tell the story when he got back from his travels—only your account and his differs a trifle. My friend says that it was *he* who made use of the hickory switch, after you had been so impolite as to squirt tobacco-juice on him, *by accident*."

At this crisis in the story-telling there was danger of an interruption to the prevailing good feeling; the surly ranger made an advance upon the broadcloth, but his fellows held him back, and laughed him out of it.

"Fair play, to-night, for everybody, and no quarrelin'," said a good-natured hunter, "you're always like a cross dog, Johnny. Take a little drop of corn-juice, and see if it don't help your temper."

The advice was complied with. During the temporary lull within, the storm burst forth more furiously without; the windows rattled, the branches of trees grated and creaked against the roof, the wind shrieked dolefully, rushing past the house with long, unearthly sighs and screams.

"Glad we ain't out of the woods to-night," said Old Hick, the chief of the hunters. "Come, now, friend Smith, from down East, it's your turn."

"I'm no hand at a story," answered the traveler, pulling out his bandana handkerchief from his pocket, and rubbing the side of his face. "I can turn a grindstone and a spinning-wheel, but I can't turn a story. But, speaking of turning a spinning-wheel puts me in mind of a ride I had, down East, almost equal to that trip down the Mississippi."

At this crisis in the story, Old Hickory suddenly rose, giving so strange a look out of one

of the windows, that the eyes of all involuntarily followed him. What they saw there caused all to spring to their feet. The face of a woman was pressed against the glass—a white, young face, with dripping locks blowing about it; the next instant it vanished, the wet branches of the trees swept against the panes, while a piercing shriek rung high above the tempest.

The blue overcoat was the first to reach and throw open the door. The light of the door, streaming out, betrayed the form of a huge negro, who had apparently just come up in front of the house, and who was turning his head in all directions, as if endeavoring to follow up the imploring cry. His bare arms, his wild, aroused face, like that of an animal which is being hunted to death, his enormous size, his glowing eyes, made a figure so unlooked-for and terrific, in the midst of the darkness and storm, that all, except Colonel Smith, were appalled. He seized his rifle which, like the others, he had placed in a corner, and sprang out.

"What is it, for God's sake, Brutus? Has any thing happened to her?"

"She's done gone, sah. They's caught her, 's afraid."

"Hark!"

Again that sharp shriek rung over all other sounds, prolonged, desperate. It sounded further away now, down the road, and by a flash of lightning the party had a glimpse of three persons running along the road. Colonel Smith dashed after them, followed by the negro and Old Hickory. Half a dozen others joined in the pursuit, but these three soon distanced them, and after a time, losing all trace of their leaders, the others returned to the tavern, wet, wondering, and dispirited, sitting about the fire to dry themselves, and looking as if they had seen ghosts.

"That beats all I ever saw," remarked one, taking a little more corn-juice to raise his spirits. "It couldn't 'a' been no young female out such a night as this—and that nigger was the devil hisself, for I saw his horns."

"So did I, plain," asserted another.

"We all saw 'em," added a third, "plain as I see that fire this minute. It's my opinion 't was a scaly trick of Old Nick to get hold of us fellers; and I'm right sorry Hickory was led away by it."

"Let Old Hickory alone," said the first speaker; "he'll take care of himself. He's an honest man, and needn't fear even Satan himself. Now, if it was I, with this here pack o' cards in my pocket, there might be more reason."

"Well, I wish he'd come back, anyhow."

But back neither he nor the blue overcoat came that night. It required an extra quantity of old Bourbon to compose the travelers to sleep; and after they had stretched themselves about the fire on their extemporized beds, a louder outbreak of the tempest would cause them to start and mutter in their sleep.

CHAPTER II.

THE HARPER AND THEIR CAPTIVE.

ABOUT four months previous to the night with which our story opens, a young man who had been riding all day through the boundless forest, stopped, a little after sunset, before a log-house which stood near the narrow bridle-path. It was a pleasant, pure evening, and the place, though solitary, had no particularly bad look about it. The traveler threw a sharp glance in at the open door, which betrayed a group of women and children. In those days it was only the most ordinary prudence for people to go well armed when abroad from home; and to look twice before they confided themselves to the hospitality of strangers; though the warm-hearted friendship of the better class of settlers was given to all who asked it. Yet Kentucky, like every other border State, was overrun with another and worse class, who, fleeing from eastern justice, or too lazy to make an honest living, sought refuge in the woods, whose coverts hid them from pursuit, and whose plentiful game furnished them a living without much exertion.

One glance would have told that the traveler was from the New England States; his air of intelligence, as well as his dress, which was not of the Kentucky style, together with a certain shrewd brightness of the eye, proclaimed the fact. Looking forward along the darkening path, which promised no end, and again into the cabin, swarming with the inmates, who now began to cluster about the door, he finally called out:

"Hallo the house! Will you tell me, ma'am, how far it is to the next tavern?"

"Don't know of none in these parts," was the answer of one of the three women who block-

aded the entrance—a wretched specimen of her sex, with a savage expression of face, and garments neither neat or becoming.

"I reckon you'll ride till you get tired, if it's taverns you're after," added the second, with a smirk, as if she took pleasure in the ability to disconcert the stranger.

"Then I shall have to ask you for food and shelter to-night," said he, pleasantly. "I've been going all day, with nothing to eat but what I brought in my knapsack, and myself and horse are both tired. Will you accommodate me?"

The three women exchanged a glance. A peculiar smile crept over their faces; after a moment's hesitation, the first one spoke again:

"We sometimes takes people who can pay their way."

"Oh, as to that," said the young man, laughing, as he leaped from his horse, "I shall feel it a favor to be allowed to pay well for every thing. If you'll get me some supper, I'll water my horse at the spring there, and then bring him around to the back of the house, and let him graze awhile before I tie him up. Haven't you any men-folks about?" he continued, with some curiosity.

"My husband's off on a hunt, and won't be back for a week or more," said the woman first mentioned. "These ere's husbands is gone, too, and they and they're young'uns is stayin' with me, 'cos we feel more safe under one roof. It's a lonesome country for women-folks to live in when the men's gone."

"What do you fear? Wild beasts or Indians?"

"Well, we reckon the Injuns the most troublesome, kase we can keep the b'ars out, but the Injuns can burn us up in our beds."

Half a dozen children, like their mother, dirty-looking and wild, crowded around the traveler as he took his horse to the spring. To get rid of them, for they were not clean enough to make close companionship desirable, he threw them a handful of pennies.

It was some time before he was ready to enter the house. First, he cared for his animal, then he bathed his face and hands in water from the spring, and wiped them on a towel which he took from his knapsack, rightly guessing that wash-bowls and towels were luxuries foreign to the cabin. Having combed out his long, light hair to his satisfaction, he took up his baggage and entered the general room, which, a little to his surprise, had an addition of a kitchen in the rear—two rooms being a fuller supply than settlers usually possessed. An inviting odor of fried ham and eggs and coffee already came from this rear apartment, in which the women were to be heard moving about. There were no signs of poverty about the place: he had found quite a serviceable log-stable behind the house, with two really fine horses in it; and now, as he took a seat on the door-sill, and glanced about the room, he saw two or three excellent saddles, a handsome harness, and all kinds of hunting gear depending from pegs in the wall. There were a couple of beds, on home-made bedsteads; and a very large blue chest, which stood between them, at the end of the apartment. Under the beds was a confused heap of boxes, harnesses, boots, and household "trash," put there to be "out of the way." One little circumstance struck the traveler as queer. Being a Yankee, he had a head for numbers; and, although he was tired, and thinking of supper, it floated dreamily through his brain that there was an unusual and unreasonable number of portmanteaus, saddle-bags, and knapsacks among the stowed-away rubbish. He gave it no particular thought at the time, but afterward he recalled it very vividly. Two of the largest boys were tossing up the pennies he had given them, beginning a life of prospective gambling by playing "heads and tails." The other children had stamped to the kitchen, attracted thither by the strong smell, which almost caused the traveler to forget how very dirty were the women who prepared the viands. Presently one of these appeared, and bid her guest "come into the other room and sit by."

The table was set for four; it was too small to accommodate the younger members of the family, who were sent out into the yard to await their turn. The young man found the food not only more various in kind, but more neatly served up than he had dared to expect. Ham, fried chicken, milk, coffee and wild-honey graced the board. But for the first moment or two, he noticed nothing of this; his attention was completely absorbed by another inmate of the cabin, whom he had not previously seen. Eve, now she did not look at him, but stood by the aking-kettle on the hearth, with folded

hands and downcast eyes. She was a young girl, no better dressed than the others, except that her linsey-woolsey gown was clean and fitted her figure; but she appeared so totally distinct from the others in features and expression, that she seemed to have dropped into this abode from some better sphere. About sixteen years of age, with a clear skin, smooth, plentiful hair neatly braided, and the form of a Hebe, it scarcely needed her modest, grave expression to make the traveler think her very pretty. He was twice asked by the hostess if he took 'lasses in his coffee, before he withdrew his eyes to answer that he did not. His interest was not unmarked by the woman, who, as she passed him the cracked cup, spoke sharply to the girl: "What be you standin' thar like a fool fur, Peggy? Hand up the cakes, if thur brown enough."

"Who is it?" the traveler was impelled to ask, curiosity or surprise overcoming prudence. "Your daughter, ma'am?"

"Yes, my darter; and an idle, good-for-nothin' girl she is."

As the woman said this, the girl flashed a swift glance at the guest; her cheeks, already flushed with the heat of the fire on that June evening, grew red as roses; she stooped, and busied herself removing the corn-cakes from the bottom of the kettle.

"Of course it will do for her mother to say that," answered the young man, striving to do away with the effect of this rude remark, "but I wouldn't like to see any one else venture to say so in your presence."

"La, I'm not so partik'ler. Howsomever, Peg's well enough when she's a mind to work; but she's powerful shiftless."

The young man's eyes meeting the young girl's at that moment, as she was placing the cakes on the table, both smiled. The vixen who presided over the coffee-pot did not observe this; but it established a magnetic telegraph between the two, which placed them in silent correspondence. While the others ate, Peggy baked cakes for them; but she did it with a regal air, like a princess serving under protest.

"What a magnificent woman she would make, under favorable circumstances," speculated the traveler, as he varied his corn-cakes and honey with glances at the fair attendant. "I feel like stealing her from these harsh people, and giving her to some one who can appreciate her. It's a shame, really, the way that woman drives her around."

Although angry with the hostess for her harshness to the girl, he knew better than to show it, and continued to make himself as entertaining as possible in payment for the trouble he was giving. He told several amusing anecdotes of his travels, and gave the latest news from the East, with such spirit and good-humor, that the three shrews laughed and listened with many admiring glances at "the peart young feller." His efforts to amuse were not so entirely for their pleasure as they imagined; he saw the kindling color, and the long, fixed look of another listener.

Darkness crept over them before they abandoned the table. Peggy lighted a thin yellow dip, and stuck it in a wooden holder. As the others left the meal, she called the eager children and sat down with them.

The traveler resumed his seat in the door; but it was the back door, not the front one. Presently he pulled the pieces of a flute from his pocket, and putting it together, began to play. At first he made the woods resound with merry dancing-tunes, until the three women declared themselves ready to dance a jig; but, gradually, the character of the music changed to soft and melancholy airs, which are so indescribably touching upon the flute, with twilight and the whispering forest about one. Even the children huddled about, sitting on their knees till they fell asleep and tumbled over; their mothers sat wrapped in pleased wonder, and Peggy, who knew not that the tallow dip revealed her face, was weeping fast and silently.

There was a softer expression on the face of the girl's mother than he had thought her capable of; but when he ceased to play, it went away again, and she bustled about as coarsely as ever, hustling the children off to bed, and scolding Peg for not having her dishes washed.

Our New Englander was a keen observer, and it began to impress itself upon him, that this isolated cabin in the backwoods had an uncanny air, as if it really were not the home of an innocent family of settlers' wives and children. He began to feel as if the husbands of such wives must be bad men, and to be glad they were away from home during his visit. He

would have liked to talk alone with the girl Peggy, to find if she really was as superior as she looked; and to let her know he liked her, and pitied her; but the women were like Cerberus, and effectually guarded the golden fruit. At every attempt he made to get near her, or on the same side of the room, one of these would foil his wish. He was certain, at last, that the girl had something she wished to say to him; and he would have given a five-dollar gold piece to know what it was. He was obliged to give up the hope when his hostess hinted to him that it was time to retire. For the last fifteen minutes Peggy had been absorbed with an old ragged book, which looked like a speller, and paid no attention to him.

"She can read, then," he thought; and as he was requested to "turn in," in no ceremonious manner, he said, "Good-night, Peggy," and moved out into the front room, where he took his carpet-bag and began to ascend the ladder, to which he was pointed, as leading to his place of rest.

"I'd really like a light a few moments," he said, insinuatingly, to the woman. "I always write a few words in my diary before I go to bed."

"Peg, bring that candle!" shouted her mother, and Peg brought it meekly. As she gave it to the guest, she pressed something else into his hand. Instantly comprehending that she wished the act to pass unnoticed, he covered the little wad of paper with the end of the candle, thanked her, and went up the ladder.

"Yer bag's right heavy—shan't I tote it for ye? Reckon thar's shiners in it," had been the unpleasant remark of one of the group, as she handed up his baggage.

"Nothing but stones," he said, quickly. "I'm a geologist, and I always have my pockets and bag full of specimens."

"Tell that to the wolves," she answered, with a sly laugh.

His curiosity was intense to learn what had been mysteriously given him. Placing his wooden candlestick on the floor, he knelt before it in such a position that should any prying eyes be lifted above the ladder, they could not discern the nature of his occupation. He then examined his new possession. It was a leaf torn out of the old spelling-book, and over it were written, in rude letters, with a piece of coal, a communication which it took him some time to decipher. It had evidently been composed with an effort. A cold shiver crept over him as he began to make it out. It ran thus:

"Do you know what you are? This howse is the Harpes. They ur gone away; but wil be bak late to nite. If you ur here they wil kill you. Clere out if you kin, and dont forgit Peggy who wil be killed mebbey for tellin'. If I'm not killed try and come bak with help and tak me away. I'm not thare dauter. I was stole when I was ate years old. I could rite some then but I've most forgot how. I've run away three times, but they got me agin. You look kind—so I tel you this. Dont come unles you ar shure you kin get me oph."

The bravest of the brave might have been excused for feeling a chill of horror creep over him, at finding himself thus shut up in the very den of the terrible Harpes. No reader of the history of Kentucky but is familiar with their reputation. They were, or represented themselves to be, brothers, who appeared in Kentucky about the year 1793, spreading death and terror wherever they went. They had with them three women, who were treated as their wives, and several children, with whom they traversed the mountainous and thinly-settled parts of Virginia into Kentucky, marking their course with blood. Their history is wonderful, as well from the number and variety as the incredible atrocity of their adventures.

Passing rapidly through the better-settled parts of Kentucky, they proceeded to the country south of Green river, which, at that time, was just beginning to be inhabited. Here they soon acquired a dreadful celebrity. Neither avarice, want, or any of the usual inducements to crime, seemed to govern their actions. A savage thirst for blood—a deep-rooted malignity against human nature, could alone be discovered in their conduct. They murdered every defenseless being who fell in their way, without distinction of age, sex, or color. In the night, they stole secretly to the honest settler's cabin, slaughtered its inhabitants and burned their dwellings; while the farmer who left his home by day, returned to witness the dying agonies of his wife and children and the conflagration of his possessions. Plunder was not their object; travelers they robbed and murdered, but from the inhabitants they took only what would have been freely given them; they destroyed

without having suffered injury, and without the prospect of gain. Females, children and servants no longer dared to stir abroad; unarmed men feared to encounter a Harpe; and the solitary hunter, as he trod the forest, looked around him with a watchful eye, and when he saw a stranger, picked his flint and stood upon the defensive. The spoils of their dreadful warfare furnished them with the means of violence and of escape. Mounted on fine horses, they plunged into the forest, eluded pursuit by frequently changing their course, and appeared unexpectedly, to perpetrate new enormities, at points distant from those where they were supposed to lurk. On these occasions they often left their wives and children behind them. So says the careful historian of characters so black that otherwise we should not dare paint them. It is not strange that the young traveler, albeit brave, self-possessed, and armed with a pair of pistols and knife, should shudder at knowing himself in the house of the Harpes. He glanced about him nervously, and again read over the charcoal scrawl.

Although a traveler, and from the East, he was not unfamiliar with the State he was traversing; having been out once before, and spent the better part of two years in land-surveying. It was to look after the interests of the vast quantity of land he had earned as a surveyor—land which promised to make him immensely wealthy within a few years—that he was now journeying through this wild, half-settled district. Everywhere, since he entered the West, he had learned of the terrible brothers; they were the talk over tavern-fires and by farmers' hearths; and he, though full of courage, had given more than one look behind him that very day, thinking he heard the distant sound of horses' feet.

Thoughts were pressed so rapidly upon his brain that they almost made him dizzy. This explained that strange *omnium gatherum* of stirrups, bridles, saddles, portmanteaux, etc., under the beds, down-stairs—the rifled property of victims, trapped, some of them, like himself. No wonder the faces of those fearful women looked cruel and brutal, debased as they were by such associations. He understood, now, something strange and startled in the expression of the young girl—a wild look, which had sometimes passed over her otherwise sweet countenance.

No doubt she had no sympathy with the people about her, but was obliged to live in the midst of scenes which she loathed. The fact that she had several times attempted to escape from them, proved that, as she grew older, and comprehended more of what she saw and heard, her pure soul shrunk from contact with it. Poor girl! What would her ultimate fate be? He could not think of it without distress; neither could he make up his mind to abandon her, perhaps to be punished for warning him to leave.

At first he decided that he would go boldly down, call Peggy, mount her behind him on his horse, and break for the deep woods. For he knew that of course this was not a permanent residence, and that perhaps by the time he was ready to return with a proper escort to secure her release, the family might be hidden in some remote wilderness which would baffle his search. They would pack up, on the morrow, knowing themselves discovered, and fly to a new den.

Yet, even did they get away from the house successfully, how would he and his companion continue their flight along that narrow bridle-path, which was not any too well marked to be kept by daylight? If the men returned soon, familiar as they were with the woods, they would easily overtake their prey.

One thing, certainly, was in his favor, and as he thought of it, his heart bounded with joy. The moon was at the full. It would shine, all night, in the cloudless summer heaven. With Caleb King, to think was to decide.

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT FLIGHT.

THE little tallow dip fluttered and sputtered in its wooden socket; it would burn but a moment longer. Caleb opened his carpet-bag and transferred from thence what coin was in it to his pocket; looked at his pistols, to see if they were in order; loosened his knife, saw by his watch that it was already ten o'clock of the brief June night. He then wrote on a slip which he tore from his note-book:

"Come out to the stable in five minutes. I shall be ready to go, and wish your company. Whistle, run like a deer, no matter what they say."

This he printed, rather than wrote, so th it

could be easily read; and then, just as the flame expired, he removed two or three small articles from the bag to his pockets, and abandoned the rest of his property. Going to the top of the ladder, he called out, in a cheery, innocent voice:

"Hallo! ladies, may I come down? I hear my horse making some fuss, and I'll have to look after him. I guess the other horses are quarreling with the stranger; and I'd better tie him further away."

Then, as they gruffly gave consent to his re-appearance, he crawled down the ladder, rubbing his eyes and saying, peevishly:

"That horse of mine is always getting into trouble with his neighbors. It's too bad to be called out of bed when a feller's so tired and sleepy he can't keep his eyes open."

The women had none of them retired, which induced him to think they intended to wait up for the men; and therefore that these might be home sooner than Peggy had intimated. They eyed him suspiciously; and by the dim light of one dip, they looked dangerous and savage as men. He understood that the three rifles in a corner of the room were loaded. The fact that he had left his carpet-sack up-stairs lulled any suspicions they might have entertained, and he was permitted to pass out.

"Peggy, won't you come and hold a light for me? If the horses are untied, I'll have to have one."

"That she won't," responded her pretended mother, sharply. "It's time gals were in bed. If you need a candle, I'll hold it."

She went to get one as she spoke. Here was a dilemma. If she went with him to the stable, how could he saddle his own horse and another, under her surveillance? He opened the door, and spoke as if he had just discovered it:

"Why, how bright the moon is! Really, I shall not need a light at all, ma'am, and you need not trouble yourself."

Peggy, as if some instinct told her what was wanted, stepped to the door and looked out, giving him the opportunity of slipping the paper into her hand. Gayly humming a tune, he stepped toward the stable; the girl pretending to look at the moon, read the paper.

"Come in, Peg, and shut that door. One would think you was cracked after that young man."

The girl obeyed; closing the back door, and thus concealing the traveler's proceedings, but going coolly to the front door, and sitting down on the step, gazing up at the moon, as if she had not a thought but that it was big and bright.

In less than five minutes she heard a low whistle just around the corner of the house; her heart was in her throat, and suffocated her, but she forced it down by an effort worthy of a hero, and glided to the corner. There stood the stranger, with two horses, which he had "saddled and bridled," "all ready for flight," and led out softly from the stable.

"Can you ride?" he whispered.

"Yes."

"Mount, then, and go to the east."

She sprang into the saddle without help—in one half-minute had all this been accomplished.

"Peg," called a furious voice at the door, "Peg, where are you?"

"Here!" answered the sturdy voice of Caleb King, "and good-by to you, ma'am." And the two riders darted out of the covert, close to the garments of the astonished woman.

A curse was the last thing they heard, as they bounded into the road and dashed along, the stranger leading and the girl keeping close behind.

"We are safely out of that, anyhow," he said, after they had left the house out of sight.

"Yes, but I'm afraid of worse," said Peggy, coming alongside. "Unless I'm mistaken, this is the road they were to come home. We shall meet 'em, I'm sure."

"The men?"

"Yes."

"Keep a stout heart, Peggy. When we hear or see them coming, we'll conceal ourselves in the forest until they pass by."

"But they'll be coming slower than we are going; and they will hear us first, and ride in the woods themselves. They will shoot us as we pass."

"That's well thought of, Peggy—we'll go slower then. We'll not talk much, but will listen hard. But there's this thing—if they should come home some other way, and take after us, we lose time by going slow."

"Their horses will be tired out—they always are when they get home, and now there's but one fresh one, since we have the other. If it comes to a race we'll beat 'em."

She said this so resolutely that he felt a new admiration for her.

"You are sure, then, that you could ride hard, if necessary?"

"Yes! I've been with them often enough to learn that."

They rode slowly along, in many cases the road so narrow that they were obliged to go in single file, the moon riding high in the heavens, but casting wild, fantastic shadows over them, from the branches of trees, which hung so close and low they sometimes brushed against them. Speaking but seldom, and listening always intently, their animals stepping lightly on the turf, which was trodden so seldom as to be still grassy, they had proceeded forward not quite an hour, when suddenly Peggy pressed forward to her companion's side, whispering:

"Hark!"

They checked their horses, and distinctly heard the regular trot of two horses coming toward them at moderate speed. There was a bend in the road just ahead, and the sound being so muffled in grass, they guessed that the riders could not be far away.

"Into the woods, quick!" whispered Caleb King; and turning his rein, he darted into the dark shadow of the forest, followed by the girl, who said, keeping up with him: "Further—further in! Do you know I'm afraid my horse will neigh."

All her courage seemed to have forsaken her. The mere thought that these men, whom she so feared and detested, were so near at hand, set her heart to palpitating frightfully.

"Keep up your courage, that's a good girl," murmured Caleb.

They made their way about a rod into the forest, when they checked their horses, and stood silent as death. The other travelers, whoever they were, approached along the road, passed opposite, and were already beyond them, and they beginning to breathe more freely, when the animal which Peggy rode, seeming to recognize his friends, gave a loud, prolonged neigh. Instantly the strange riders checked their course; our party could not see them; but they caught the words, uttered with an oath:

"That's my horse, Bill. What mischief is up, now?"

"We'll soon see," said the other, and together they dashed into the woods directly toward the concealed couple.

"Now, my girl, follow me!" cried Caleb King; and wheeling, he dashed off among the trees and underbrush at a rate which might have proved dangerous, had not his horse been possessed of almost human sagacity. As it was, they miraculously escaped death among the branches and thickets which impeded their progress, and came out upon the road a few rods above the point at which they had deserted it. Their pursuers followed them by the sound of crashing underbrush. The point at which they reappeared was more grassy and open than usual, the forest circling off leaving an open space, which, as they rode over it, made them fair marks for the two men, who dashed after them, not three minutes behind.

"Stop, or we'll fire!" they yelled.

The flying couple knew too well that they would fire if they did stop; Caleb stroked his horse, urging it on with some familiar word which made it fairly bound over the ground, while looking back with anxious eye, he was glad to see that the girl kept up with him.

Crack! crack!—two pistol-shots, which whistled around them, doing no injury.

"They have rifles, too. On to the shadow of the wood," cried Peggy. Another and louder shot—another! Caleb looked to see where the girl was; she was close beside him, unharmed, her gallant animal keeping up with his.

"Thank God, the shadows will distract their aim," murmured Caleb, as they sprung forward where the path was again close in with woods.

He did not attempt to guide his horse, leaving the choice of the way to him, and the noble fellow galloped as if he knew that he bore his master's life in his paces. Peggy kept close behind, and once she screamed:

"Faster! I hear them coming—faster!"

For a terrible half-hour it was all suspense. Then, as the girl had said, the previously worn condition of the pursuers' horses began to tell on them, their speed flagged, they fell so far behind as to be neither seen nor heard. Still, they did not feel safe; the enemy might be making a detour, to dash out upon them, by some shorter path with which they were familiar. On—on—they urged their steeds, until every muscle of the hardy animals was strained, and foam and sweat covered them.

"I think we may venture to rest," said the young man, after what seemed an age, but was, in reality, an hour. "We shall kill our horses if we keep on at this rate."

They drew rein, listening attentively. Nothing was to be heard except the panting of the horses; the moon shone brightly through a rift in the trees; all was quiet, solemn, and strange.

"You are a brave woman, Peggy, to keep up with me to-night."

He could see her blush and smile in the clear moonlight, pleased with his approval. The ride had shaken down her hair, which glistened and waved about her face. Really she was very pretty—more than pretty—handsome, spirited, equal to an emergency.

It was a wild and curious adventure which had thrown this young woman upon his protection, under such novel circumstances. He had a few moments' time to think of it, before she spoke:

"Oh, sir, let us not rest very long. I do not feel safe yet. Indeed, you do not know how bad they are, nor what they can do."

Her cheeks grew pale with the thought, and she glanced about her like a frightened deer.

"Well, Prince, are you ready to start?" said Caleb to his horse. "The young lady thinks we are not yet free from danger."

His cheerful tone reassured her. She was almost ready to laugh, as they again proceeded on their singular journey, swiftly, but with less wild speed than before. Caleb had many things to consider during the long hours of their night-ride—the principal of which was the safety of the girl he had taken under his wing. He well knew that pursuit would be long-continued, persevering, and conducted with the malignant skill and revengeful malice to be expected from such characters. Every acre of the State of Kentucky would be minutely searched, by night, by day, by unexpected methods; and a devilish ingenuity racked to track the fugitive to her concealment. Where, then, should he convey her? How conceal her until his business in the West was finished, and he could take her to the East, and place her under proper protection? For this he had already resolved to do.

CHAPTER IV.

BRUTUS AND HIS NEW CHARGE.

FOUR days after the adventure of the last chapter, just as the family of a wealthy planter in Bourbon county were about retiring for the night, horses were heard riding up to the door, upon which some one knocked with a whip. The good "squire" himself, in his shirt-sleeves, opened the door, and peered out, light in hand, at the new-comers.

"Hallo! King is that you? Glad to see you. Where'd you come from? And who in wonder have you got with you?" he added, *sotto voce*.

"It's me, no mistake, Squire Claiborne. I promised you I'd come out West this summer, and here I am. Can I put up with you to-night? I've a little business to talk over."

"I reckon you needn't ask that question here. If my house wasn't big enough for my friends, I'd have it made bigger, short order. I'm right glad to see you, too; I've been thinkin' a good deal about that land operation, this season. Ho, Brutus! come and take the gentleman's horses. Who've you got there, King—your sister, or your wife?"

The squire might have been excused the look of curiosity he bent upon the bare-headed girl, in her linsey-woolsey frock, who, with downcast eyes, sat upon a horse, beside the young man.

"She is a friend, squire, and that, I trust, will secure her a welcome among your women-folks, until I have time to tell you all about her. She has a history which will interest you."

"All right, my friend. She's welcome; and I'm sure you needn't keep out here to tell any stories. Come in, come in. Oh-h, Brutus! here, boy, take these horses away, and treat 'em well."

"Ah, Brutus, still as sublime as ever," said the young gentleman, pleasantly, as a large, singular-looking negro came up, and took the reins of the animals.

He doffed his cap and smiled, showing himself well pleased when he recognized the guest. "We're glad to see you back, Massa Caleb. I'll tend to dem hosses, sartain. Why," he exclaimed, as the light fell more plainly on the weary and panting animals, "dey looks like dey'd seen hard times."

"They have—they've passed through a trying ordeal, Brutus," said Caleb King, turning to

assist his companion to dismount, but she had sprung to the ground, and was looking swiftly about her as if she wished to face her position, however doubtful it might be.

"Passed through a frying cordial, have they?" repeated the servant, who, like all of his race, preferred high-sounding words. "That's what the matter wid 'em, is it?—oh, ho! I don't wonder dey looks bad."

The squire ushered his guests into the hall, where his wife came out to meet them; and a hospitable bustle succeeded the previous quiet. They were taken into the kitchen to wash themselves, where the cook soon placed a cold but substantial supper on the table, their hosts rightly guessing they would prefer this to the delay of a warm meal and the dining-room. Mrs. Claiborne was as kind-hearted as it was possible for a woman to be, which is saying a good deal, and was very motherly to the young girl; yet she could hardly conceal the curiosity she felt as to who she was, where she came from, and why she had no bonnet.

Her curiosity was soon gratified. As soon as the guests had finished their meal, King asked a private interview with his friends, and the four adjourned to the "keepin'-room," where, with closed doors, and chairs drawn closely together, the whole story of the last four days was related. The Claibornes listened with breathless interest, for the mere mention of the name of Harpe was enough to thrill them with mingled horror and curiosity. The girl bore, with a dignity which could hardly have been expected, the inquisitive looks which were bent upon her; her cheek was pale and her eyes heavy with fatigue, and yet a sort of gladness illuminated her countenance—like that which might the face of one rescued from some terrible danger. Every look, every word, betrayed how utterly she loathed the companionship into which she had been forced. It was fearful to think of the years through which she had passed—years which should have been the most joyous of her life, filled with innocent hopes, yet darkened by this shadow, turned to dread and misery by the knowledge which crept about her, like a serpent, of the character of those with whom she made her home.

Now, as the four sat there, discussing her case, she was asked many questions in regard to the statement she had made Caleb King, that she was not the daughter of these people, but had been stolen by them, when eight years of age. She answered according to the best of her ability. "A fever," she said, "brought on, probably, by fright and homesickness, and during which she was delirious for some time, had attacked her after she was stolen from her own parents; and when she recovered, her memory of the past was very much impaired. For a long time she recalled nothing—not even her own name—but gradually she had regained many recollections of her former life. For one thing, she remembered that her own mother used to call her Bella and Isabel, though by no effort could she recall her family name."

"That woman names me Peggy, but won't you say Bella, when you speak to me?" she asked, looking at good Mrs. Claiborne in such a way that her eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, yes, honey, you shall be called what you like, here."

From the few fragments to which the lost girl still clung, her new friends came to the conclusion that the Harpes, as many as eight years ago, were engaged in their present unlawful pursuits, and that her parents had fallen victims to their murderous propensities. That these parents were probably educated people, with money, perhaps living in some isolated Virginia country home—but what the purpose of the murderers had been, in carrying off the child, could not be conjectured. It may have been that the bright face of the little girl—which could not have been otherwise than pretty and attractive—had touched a fountain of mercy, and unsealed it, in the black depth of one or both their hearts, filling them with a fancy to adopt her. Wretches, so isolated from humanity as they, have been known to exhibit some such incongruous glimpse of feeling.

Caleb also gave a brief account of their four days' flight—or, rather, four nights' flight, for they had remained concealed in the houses of friendly settlers three of those days, keeping their horses strictly out of sight in some clump of underbrush, or little bush-hidden dell, so that if the Harpes came about the cabins, they would get no trace of the fugitives. The last day, being in a more thickly-populated country—though still wild enough—and on a road which King knew perfectly, they had ventured to ride by sunlight, keeping sharp watch all the time.

"I have brought her to you," Caleb concluded, "because you are my friends—the best I have in this part of the country, and I know Mrs. Claiborne's goodness of heart. I believe you'll take my little girl, here, into your family, and do all you can to keep her from those fiends, until my business is finished in Kentucky. We are now two hundred miles from the place where she forsook the Harpes; then, too, you live so near the village, that they will hardly come about your place, and if Bella"—with a smile at the girl—"changes name and dress, and is very cautious about going out, wearing a veil when she does go, and you will represent her as a young friend or relative staying with you, I believe she will be tolerably safe here. I expect to be four or five months in the State; when I am ready to return to the East, I think I will take her with me, for I cannot feel as if she would ever be perfectly safe in this vicinity. I can turn her over to my mother, or some other good lady, who will see that she is put in the way of taking care of herself. She can learn shirt-making, or bonnet-trimming, or any other feminine art she pleases."

So said the young man, but it is doubtful if those four days with a beautiful girl, who looked up to him as her savior and protector, had not already put thoughts in his head of a different destiny for Bella than that of millinery. Perhaps he did not know himself; for, graceful and handsome as she was, with a spirit of haughty independence mingling with feminine timidity, she was, of course, deficient in all proper accomplishments which would fit her to become the wife or adopted sister of a man like himself. Still—she was so picturesque, so interesting by her very singularity! He was convinced, too, that she was of good blood. Not only did every clearly-cut feature proclaim it, the delicacy of her feet and hands, and the fineness of her hair, but there was that in her bearing which no degradation could humiliate—a spirit which had doubtless evoked, on her unhappy day, many hard words, if not blows, from the virago who desecrated to her the name of mother.

"Pears to me, it wouldn't be exactly proper for you to be her only escort, on such a long journey," said the matron, with a smile.

"Well, I never thought of that—I was only thinking of the poor child's safety," and the young man looked perplexed at this dilemma—"indeed, ma'am, since the night-and-day journey we have just taken together, it seems as if she belonged to me, as much as my own sister. But we'll not trouble our heads about that, now. It may be that you, Mrs. Claiborne, will consent to take that trip to your old home at the East, which you was telling me you was so anxious about. In that case, I might have the privilege of escorting you both. Now, my trouble is, to keep her from falling again into those terrible hands."

"She shall be guarded every hour, like gold," said the squire, heartily.

"Thank you—I knew you would say so. Our first step must be to get rid of that horse which she rode. It belongs to the Harpes, and if it was seen by them, it would, of course, lead them directly to their prey."

"But how to get rid of it! Shall we kill it, and bury it?"

"What would you say to Brutus's taking him, post-haste, across the Ohio river, and selling him to some Ohio traveler? It's a pity to kill so fine an animal."

"He might do that. He's brave, and wouldn't be afraid if we told him all about what's up."

"I think he had better be told the whole affair, squire. Brutus is a sharp fellow; we could not set any better guard over Miss Bella than him. If you should charge him to keep an eye on prowlers, and to make her safety his special business, I don't believe even the Harpes could get too close to her. None of the other servants need know anything about her history—the fewer who are trusted with it the better. But Brutus must be appointed her body-guard."

"Jes' so," said the squire. "Ye're right."

"And now let's give the poor dear a chance to rest herself," said the matron, rising; and soon the household was at rest.

The next morning Caleb King called Brutus into the front yard, away from all listeners, and gave him a brief sketch of Miss Bella, and of the post of protector assigned to him. The negro was absorbed in the story from the first; but as the young man proceeded down to the point of giving Peggy's real first name, and one or two little things which she remembered, a strange excitement seized upon the sable attendant. The whites of his eyes began to roll, he stood on one foot, then the other, started to run

toward the house, and came back again, until his agitation became so funny and so apparent, that King stopped and asked him what was the matter.

"Oh, sah! 'scuse me, sah. My head is done turned upside down. I didn't rest berry well last night; and I's sort o' giddy-like. Poor little baby! I'spects her folks was murdered, sure 'nuff. Trus' ole Brutus for to take care o' her. They sha'n't hurt a ha'r of her head. I'll sleep wid one eye open, Massa King; won't cotch dis weasel asleep, no sah! You can trus' dat young lady to me with perfect company."

"You won't regret any trouble that you may take on her account," continued Caleb, drawing forth a half-eagle from his pocket; but Brutus made a gesture of disdain, and would not touch the glittering bribe.

"Don't want no pay for waitin' on her, massa. But wouldn't yer jis' let me go and take a good look at her? So's I know her when I come to see her, yer see?" he explained, and without waiting for an answer, he dashed frantically up to the house and disappeared within. The young man followed, surprised and amused at the half-crazy manner of the negro, and reached the keeping-room a little behind Brutus, where Bella (as by her request they now began to call her) was holding some yarn for Mrs. Claiborne to wind. The servant dashed into the room with a want of ceremony quite different from his usual studied politeness, stopped short, gazed on the girl a moment, with open mouth, and suddenly fell on his knees, with outstretched hands. Then he jumped up and began rubbing his knees, as if the kneeling position had been injurious to him. His mistress regarded him with astonishment, while her young companion, struck with the ludicrous movements of the old fellow, burst out laughing.

"Dar, dar; I sed so!" cried Brutus, stopping and gazing straight at her again. "I sed so, and now I's proved it!"

"What did you say, and what have you proved?" asked King. The question seemed to partially recall him to the figure he was making. He retreated toward the door, put on his usual deferential manner in Mrs. Claiborne's presence, pulled his wool, and with a sort of quick slyness, answered:

"Didn't 'no' what I was a-sayin', massa. I's had de headache bad dis mornin'; 'scuse me, missus, but I was so upso't hearin' sich an incredulous story dat I mos' forget to behave myself—dat's a fac'. Laugh away, Missa Bella, at ole nigger—he lub to heer young folks laugh—soun's like ole times—'wen I use to lib in ole Virginny. On dis one thing you may reckon, for a dead sure, and dat is—dar sha'n't nobody hurt you wile Brutus is around!" And with this comforting assurance he backed out of the room which he had so unceremoniously entered.

"What an odd person," cried the young girl.

"He'll be a good friend of yours, I feel certain," replied Mrs. Claiborne. "We've had him now nearly eight years, and we realize, every day, how important his services are to us. He can do *any thing* he is asked to—And his judgment is excellent. The squire trusts the whole farm to him when he is away. He's a great hunter, too—almost equal to Old Hickory. His great holiday is when he has permission to put on his hunting-suit—a queer rig which he has—and go off into the woods to get a supply of venison and wild-fowls, for family use. What's the matter with him this morning I can't guess. Maybe he was out to meeting last night, and got so excited that he hasn't settled down yet. I assure you, Bella, if he takes you under his wing, you'll be well cared for."

"Oh, I like him!" said she, laughing again at the memory of his ridiculous actions; "I've taken a great fancy to him. I feel as if he and I were old friends, a'ready. I b'lieve I've seen him somewhere before to-day, but I don't call to mind where."

"That's only a notion of yours," said the matron. "He hasn't been over twenty mile from here since we brought him from old Virginny; and, of course, you've never been in this part of the country before."

"I'm sure I've seen him," persisted Bella—and then her dark eyes, meeting those of Caleb, softened and drooped, and she dropped the chain of memory which linked her to the sable servant, the broken links of which she had been trying to put together.

That day Brutus started off with the horse which had belonged to the Harpes, conveyed him safely across the Ohio, sold him to good advantage, and returned with the proceeds, which were devoted to fitting up such a wardrobe for the fugitive girl as was suitable to her present position.

After his return, Caleb went to another part of the State, where business called him. In those days, a journey to the seaboard was a long and arduous undertaking; and no plan could be formed for sending Mrs. Claiborne and Bella forward, until King was able to act as their escort. All that could be done was to use the utmost vigilance to prevent the Harpes from getting possession of the fugitive; and in this, Caleb trusted much to Brutus, who expressed the utmost interest, and a determination to guard the young missus as he would the apple of his eye.

So she was left in the kind home of the Claibornes, while the young man went about his affairs. The summer sped swiftly on; Caleb paid several brief visits to the squire's, and those good people whispered and smiled to each other upon the turn matters were taking with the young couple.

During those many weeks Bella and Brutus had become warm friends. There was something peculiar in the interest he took in her, and in return for his faithful zeal in her behalf, she felt for him the affection of a childish, impulsive nature for one who is very kind. She felt almost safe under his eye; though he, and others, knew that a dread like a hateful nightmare, hung over her young life; her cheek would blanch, and she would start and tremble at an unexpected sound.

Bella had many long talks with her colored servitor—she liked to hear his gossip about the good times past in "ole Virginny;" and often he asked her questions about her own childhood, before her parents were murdered, putting them in such a way as greatly to assist her memory—so that, before the summer was over, she was quite certain that she should know her old home, if ever she saw it, and even began to tell him incidents of her infancy. If any one more experienced than this wild girl had overheard their conversation, they would have known that Brutus had some special object in leading her mind back to those days; and it would not be difficult for them to conjecture that he knew more about her and her past history than she did herself. But he was careful not to betray this before others. He tried hard to make her remember her family name, but she could not recall it, though she mused upon it many a time, until her head and heart ached. Finally, one day she came to him, her cheeks red and her face lighted up with exultation.

"Brutus, I know, now, what my name used to be."

"How do you know, missa?" He looked at her eagerly.

"It came to me, last night, in my sleep."

"What do you think it is, honey?"

"I don't think—I know! It's Moultrie. My father's name was Jefferson Moultrie; and I'm going to tell Mr. King so, next time I see him."

"I wouldn't tell him just yet," said Brutus, earnestly. "Don't tell him till I tell yer to, Missa Bella, don't! I's got good reasons for it. But I's mighty glad ye recollected it—oh, Lordy, yis! Moultrie's quite a respectable name, honey—and we'll hev' it looked to. But, mind ole Brutus, now—yer wait a little while."

She was rather reluctant to promise, but did so, finally.

And now, it will not be hard for the reader to guess who were the characters introduced in the first chapter, although Caleb therein was masquerading a little, as he was fond of doing, when he got in a company of inquisitive strangers—nor will it be difficult to conjecture that the ever-feared, carefully-guarded-against calamity had at last taken place.

CHAPTER V. HOLED.

CALEB KING, (alias Smith,) Brutus, and the hunter, running down the road in the rain and darkness, paused simultaneously. It was the swift clatter of horses' hoofs, receding in the distance, which thus brought them to a standstill.

"Oh, Lord, we shall nebber cotch 'em now," groaned the negro.

"No, they have mounted and ridden off with her," and Caleb gave a groan of despair. "Oh, Brutus, did you not promise me to watch her?"

"I hab watch her, Massa King—you know dat—night and day. She nebber sot foot outside dat door, 'cept when I was clust arter her heels. Don't go for to blame me!"

"Well, well! don't stop, even to tell me how it happened. Run to the stable of the tavern, and bring me my horse—run, boy, do you hear?"

The negro was off before the command was finished.

"What good'll that do?" asked the hunter, with a deliberation which chilled the young man's hopes still more—"they will be out o' sight or hearin' long afore you can overtake 'em. And on such a night as this, what can you do? 'Tain't likely they'll keep in the right road; and if they did, and heerd you after 'em, they could dodge you easy."

"I know it," was the desponding reply.

"Jes' tell a friend what's up, won't yer? If I can help you, I will. But what in creation all this rumpus means is more'n I can guess. Old Hickory is put to his stumps. Here you are, racing out in the rain, with the devil himself for a friend, and a woman a-hollerin' and yellin', and two men runnin' after her—it beats me to make head or tail of it. I'm rather partik'lar about the company I keep, and the fust thing I want settled before I offer my company, is, whether that's the old feller himself?" meaning Brutus.

If Caleb had not been so troubled in his mind he would have enjoyed the hunter's perturbation about Brutus. As it was, he could not be otherwise than serious; he answered, plainly:

"You know Squire Claiborne? Well, that's his colored boy, who cares for his horses and drives for him. He's a very peculiar 'nigger' at all times; and to-night he's fixed himself up in this style for some purpose, I expect."

"Jes' as we hunters fix ourselves to fool the deer," interposed Hickory. "I see now. He's out on the trail of somethin', and he's dressed himself to suit."

"I was going to the squire's—expected to reach there to-night; but it rained so very hard, I concluded to stop at Coon's till daylight—it's only about three miles further to the squire's. What has happened, I can easily guess—and if I thought you could assist me, I'd tell you all about it."

"I'm willin' to lend a hand, if it's anything in my line."

"You know the country better than any other man in the State, I've been told."

"So they say."

"Well, I hope, then, that you can help me. You have heard of the Harpes?"

"Heard of 'em!" exclaimed the hunter, with an oath. "Who hain't heard of them infernal demons. I'd consider it the biggest hunt I ever made, if I could unearth them wild beasts. It works on my mind, to think I hain't trapped 'em yet."

"Those men who have just escaped us are the Harpes!"

"Thunder—and blazes!"

"And they have stolen a young woman who was visiting at the Claibornes'. She was the daughter of some persons whom they murdered, and carried off and adopted the child—but she never liked to live with them, and finally succeeded in getting away from them. The Claibornes were hiding and protecting her. I'll tell you her story some time. I'd give all I'm worth to get her safely out of their hands—for I'm afraid they will either kill her, or torment her in some manner, to punish her for running away. Besides, if they once get fairly away with her, we'll never get trace of her again."

If it had not been dark, the young man might have noticed the hunter scratching his head vigorously, with a reflective look, as if trying to waken a sleeping idea.

"Oh, Brutus, why do you not make haste?" again cried Caleb.

"See here, stranger, what's yer name? Smith, I b'lieve. You needn't—"

"My name is not Smith—it's King—I said that for a joke on the fellow who asked me so many questions," said poor Caleb, in remorse for having played tricks on those whom he might now need for friends. "I always say my name is Smith when any one asks who has no right. Call me King, friend."

"Wal, Mr. King, I've a notion I can help you a little."

"In what way?" was eagerly asked.

"Mind, I don't say I kin—I only say I've a notion I kin. So you mustn't be disapp'inted if I make a mistake—"

"Oh, why doesn't he come with that horse?" interposed Caleb.

"And if I should be right in my guess," proceeded the hunter, "thar's no need of yer bein' in such a terrible hurry. Now, mind, I say I ain't sure, but I believe I kin show you whar them devils has their den at present, and whar they'll take the girl."

Caleb made a dodge in the dark to seize his new friend's hand, in a sudden burst of hope and gratitude:

"Where? Where?"

"Well, I reckon it's nigh on to about ten miles from here. I'm nowise sartin 'twas them I saw, about two o'clock this arternoon, but I've my reasons for thinkin' 'twas. And if 'twas them, they'll put up thar to-night—'cause it's too stormy for man or beast to be abroad; and we can reach the spot afore daylight."

Brutus now came up with King's horse and another which he had taken without permission from the stable—the emergency justifying the liberty, in his opinion. He breathed hard with the haste of his expedition.

"What reason have you for thinking you saw the Harpes?"

"A good deal of reason, come to put it all together. I was comin' in from the hunt, with the rest you saw there to the tavern. We was in a wild sort of a place, full ten miles from hyer, trudgin' for Coon's, as we saw the storm comin'; I was quite a piece ahead of the others, when I thought I heerd an animal trampin' and snuffin' some ways off, towards a desput wild holler, which I knew lay to the right. It was a ravine, with rocks risin' up on 't'other side—a place I knew well, and had been through often, though none of my friends knew about it. I'd killed two b'ars in that ravine the winter afore, and as I heerd the critter movin', I thought it mought be another b'ar, so I jist moved softly towards it to diskliver. I wanted the glory of killin' the b'ar without help; so I didn't wait for 't'others, but crept along about a hundred yards till I come to a spot where I could peep into the holler, and there I saw, instid of my b'ar, a couple o' tame horses, tethered with ropes, and with thur saddles on, quietly grazin'. I thought, at the time, it was mighty queer, and I was mad, for two reasons: one at not findin' a b'ar, and 't'other becase I was afraid somebody had disklivered my house, as I call it. Yer see, under them rock thur's an openin' into as purty a cave as ever ye sot eyes on—dry an' high, with a nat'ral sort of a chimney, where a person can have a fire. I've staid in it more'n one night. I've often used it for a storehouse; by puttin' up a timber or two against the entrance, to keep out wild animals, I could keep my skins and blankets and things in thar, when I was out on a trappin' frolic. Wal, when I seed the horses I made up my mind somebody was prowl'n' around and makin' head-quarters in the cave. I couldn't decide whether it was Injuns racin' down here on a stealin' expedition, or some o' them counterfeits as has been chased pretty lively lately. It wur a-beginning to rain pretty smart, by that time, so I made up my mind I'd say nothin' to the boys to-night, but 'arly in the mornin' we'd make up a party, and inquire into the matter. I never thought of them Harpes! Blast 'em; if I had, we'd 'a' had thur skins afore this, for thar was six of us, and we'd 'a' quickly smoked them out o' thur hole."

"But do you really think they'll go back there? Won't they ride all night, and be far away before we begin our pursuit?"

"I reckon they won't, stranger. They wouldn't be cute if they did. They know very well the whole country'd be roused in the mornin', men closin' in all directions, runnin' fifty and a hundred miles arter 'em—while here they'll be, right under our noses, safe and sound. If I hadn't happened to see their horses this arternoon, I'll bet they mought stay thar six months without bein' tracked. They sartainly won't stir out of that afore to-morrow night, and I doubt if they do then. They've probably got things fixed for a comfortable stay."

"Well?" asked Caleb, groaning with impatience, as he thought of the girl's fright and danger, in that lonely place with those terrible men.

"You don't s'pose the gal's in any partik'ler immedit danger?" asked Old Hick, seeing his distress of mind.

"I don't know. She says the men have always treated her kindly, especially the one who calls himself her father; but their anger at her escape, and the trouble they have had in finding her, may exasperate them into murderin' her. Why they have ever shown any more mercy to her than to the other helpless creatures who have fallen into their hands, is a mystery."

"Tain't no mystery to dis pusson," muttered Brutus to himself. "I knows what der arter—no mistake 'bout dat."

"Tain't likely they'll kill her if they've had an object in keepin' her so many years," remarked the hunter. "But, whatever's up, it's safest and best to wait a few hours, since we know whar they'll bring up. Yer see if we track 'em too close, we run the risk o' bein' shot down in the dark without doin' her no good; while, if we wait till they's housed, and p'raps sound asleep, we can bag 'em without no

trouble. Another thing in favor of takin' it cool: I reckon the rain will quit off a little after midnight, when the moon rises; it would be impossible to find our way in this darkness, and to carry a light would be to expose ourselves and kiver them. We must get a good ready, and set out about two o'clock, by the light of the moon. I'll do mighty well, then, if I keep the track, for I tell ye, thar ain't a wilder spot in Kentuck than that same holler, and the path that leads to it."

"Better adjourn, den, to de square's. He'll be mighty oneasy when he finds me and Miss Bella missin'; didn't have time to stop in de house and tell 'em what had happened. Oh, my! Oh, Lordy! To t'ink I should set myself round about dat young lady like a ring of glory or a hedge-fence, fur to protect her, and keep dem painters 'way all summer, jest to spring on dat poor lamb, and carry her off afore my eyes, at last, in de whisk of a pig's tail! Oh, Lordy, it's too bad!"

The old servant's distress was too great for Caleb to add to it by reproaches; even if there had been any cause for reproach, which he had no reason to think. He knew that the cunning of those diabolical men was more than a match for the utmost prudence; and he blamed himself—only himself—that he had left that helpless young girl so long exposed to the dangers of her situation. Why had he not dropped all his business interests, and conveyed her to a place of safety? It was what he should have done. How paltry now appeared every other consideration beside that of her welfare!

Ah, Caleb King had not made those five or six visits to the squire's without becoming more and more deeply involved in the cause of the beautiful orphan. It is dangerous to the generous and sensitive heart to extend protection to youth and beauty. The mere fact that Bella regarded him with such gratitude, and had such faith in his promise to protect her, was enough of itself to make him think tenderly of her. The bright blush which sprung to her cheek when they met, the flutter of her heart, the trembling of her hand, the soft light of the full, dark eye, had already done their magic work upon his heart. Yet he did not know it—he scarcely suspected it now. He only felt that his soul was weary with intolerable suspense.

"Yes, it will be best to go to the squire's in the mean time," he said, "unless it takes us too far away."

"It's to the south, ain't it, Squire Claiborne's? Then it's out of our way; but I think thar's a cross-cut from there, 'twill bring us out nigh to the p'int where we leave the main road. We may as well stop there as anywhere."

"But how about getting more help from the town?" asked Caleb.

"Three to two's enough, if thur trusty," said the hunter, curtly. "Are you sure with the rifle, my colored friend?"

"I dunno any man, 'ceptin' Old Hick, that I b'lieve giv up to."

"Yes, Brutus is better than two ordinary fellows," continued Caleb; "strong as a lion, cool, and familiar with the rifle."

"Then we don't want more company. It's my experience that enough's better than too much. Silence and cunning is what traps the game. Lead on, stranger, to the squire's."

"And you, Brutus, put that borrowed horse back in the stable."

As they passed the tavern, Brutus returned the horse, and the three men walked rapidly forward in the rain, leading Caleb's animal, which his master would not mount, since the hunter was on foot. It was not until they were drying themselves in the great kitchen of the house, with the squire's family gathered anxiously about, that Caleb learned the incidents touching the kidnapping of the young woman. Incidents they could hardly be called, for there was but the meager fact that Bella had been in the kitchen, after supper, unusually bright and happy, and wishing some cool water to drink, had stepped outside to the well, which was but four feet from the door, and upon which the light from the kitchen fell distinctly. When she did not come in again, the cook went to the door, looked about, called, and thinking Miss Bella had run round to the front door, thought no more of it, until her mistress came out and asked for her; and then

"There were hurryings to and fro."

The squire was summoned from his comfortable seat in the keeping-room, and great inquiries were made for Brutus. When it was ascertained that neither he nor Bella were anywhere about the place, the alarm increased. The young girl had won herself too warm a place in

the childless hearts of the good couple for them not to feel the keenest dismay at the disaster. The squire had pulled on his big boots, put on his overcoat, and, with his gun and a lantern, accompanied by his servants and dogs, had stumped all over the place—which, without Caleb, or even Brutus, to advise him, was all he could think to do—and had come in a few moments before our party, very wet and tired, and very melancholy. Brutus had now to add his mite of information. He had seen Miss Bella in the kitchen, when he went out, after getting his supper. A few minutes later, as he was in the stable, he thought he heard the sound of feet running past, but he would not have considered it, if, a moment later, a muffled scream, "clipped off," as he said, "right in the middle, hadn't brought it home to him, like a streak of lightning," what it all meant." For an instant he stood, paralyzed by the suddenness of the shock; then, with the lantern in his hand, by the light of which he was currying the horses, he rushed out, and holding it up and turning it all around, he saw two men making off with his young missus through the cornfield. He did not stop to give the alarm, for they were already climbing the fence into the woods on the other side, and he was afraid he should lose them. They had a good deal the start, when he gave chase, yelling at the top of his voice; but the storm made such a noise that his shouts attracted no attention at the house. Two or three times they got entirely out of sight and hearing, and again he would approach so near that a ray of his lantern would light on them as they ran, dragging the girl between them. When he found they were coming out into the high-road, and would have to pass Coon's tavern, he thought he might get help.

It was conjectured now, by her friends, that when the poor child saw the light streaming out of the tavern window, inspired by hope, she had made a frantic effort, by which she freed herself from her persecutors, and running to the window, she had endeavored to call attention to her situation, but that the men had immediately re-seized her, and hurried her off to the spot where their horses were concealed. There was no doubt, if the suspicions of Old Hickory were correct, that the brothers had been in the neighborhood some time, concealing themselves in the cave in the ravine, and coming out in the evening; that they had tied their horses at some spot so distant as to attract no attention, and then had prowled about the vicinity, seeking the opportunity which had, at length, offered.

Good Mrs. Claiborne laughed hysterically when Old Hickory assured her that there were good prospects, not only of the young woman being rescued, but of the Harpes being brought to justice. The squire rubbed his rheumatic legs, and declared he should make one of the party; but this the hunter firmly opposed. His idea, as he had previously expressed it, was silence, discretion, and skill; so that the game might be quietly bagged, if possible, without the loss of valuable lives. The plan was to ride within a couple of miles of the cave, then to dismount, cautiously approach on foot, and silently, by the first rays of dawn, take up each man a concealed position, commanding the mouth of the cave; and, when the men came out, as they would be sure to do, sooner or later, to reconnoiter, and to attend to their horses, to shoot them down.

This plan required qualities which the squire did not possess—patience, endurance, and the ability to keep perfectly quiet. After position was once taken up, there must not be the movement of a hand, though they should be compelled to wait for hours, for, undoubtedly, the villains had some loophole through which to overlook the ravine, and would never venture forth without a cautious examination of the vicinity. Therefore, as it would be impossible to guess what moment their eyes might be searching the hollow, it would be necessary to make no movement which might alarm them, until they saw fit to come forth. Nor, if one at a time should appear, would it be desirable to dispose of him, even if they had to wait dreary and uncomfortable hours; for their object, above all things, was to preserve the safety of the young lady, and unless the Harpes were both secured in such a manner as to prevent the possibility of their wreaking revenge upon her, there was great danger that they would murder her out of pure malice, should they find themselves at all likely to be snared.

After the matter had been thoroughly discussed in every possible light, Mrs. Claiborne went about providing for the physical comfort of the besieging party. As it was probable that they would be kept breakfastless, if not dinnerless,

she prepared a midnight luncheon of cold ham and pumpkin pie, with a large bowl of hot negus—which latter stimulant their exposure to the storm had made a sanitary measure. As the hunter sat by the fire, toasting his feet, he kept his eyes upon Brutus, who remained respectfully in the background. He was making up his mind as to the exact worth of the new recruit. Caleb King he believed to be fearless and prudent, if not deeply skilled in border tactics; the manner in which he had carried himself during the story-telling and quarreling in Coon's tavern—where he had played a part for the mere fun of it—proved this to the quick-witted ranger. Apparently he became well satisfied of the true character of Brutus—that he was a fellow of exceeding sagacity, and to be relied upon in any emergency—for he addressed to him some pleasant remarks, bidding him come closer to the fire, so as to be thoroughly warmed and dried for the exposure which was to follow.

"He thinks a power o' the gal, anyhow," thought Old Hickory, observing the restlessness of the negro, which would not permit him to be still a moment, and the expression of dejection, mingled with determination, which made still darker his dark and uncouth features. Indeed, the negro's uneasiness was fully equal to the young land-agent's. Once, he muttered audibly, forgetful of the ears about him:

"Oh, Lordy, I dunno but I oughter 'a' told him all, at first! But she would 'a' been no safer for dat, if I had," he added—then, conscious that he had spoken aloud, he cast a curious look at Caleb, who was gazing at him in astonishment.

"If you've any thing to tell, Brutus, that will help us in this emergency, speak out," he said, sternly.

"Deed, Massa King, I don't know nuffin' as will help us in dis missionary. If I did I shouldn't keep it back, yer better b'lieve. I was only a-wishin' I'd 'a'—done suthin' I didn't."

Seeing that he did not like to be questioned, and having so much confidence in him, Caleb made no further inquiries.

As the hunter had predicted, shortly after the rising of the moon, the heavy pall which stretched from one side of the heavens to the other was lifted, and a faint light began to glimmer through. The three adventurers, after carefully examining their rifles and knives—the former having been in danger of injury from the rain—mounted the horses which were prepared for them, and with the earnest prayers of Mrs. Claiborne for their safety and success, took the little by-road which led off through the woods in the direction of the murderers' haunt.

They had not much more than left the path, and taken to apparently trackless depths of forest, when the moon broke forth in renewed splendor, casting a fantastic and rather unreliable glimmer through the rain-laden birches, which, uncertain and wavering as it was, materially assisted them to keep in the way. Caleb King thought of that other night, upon which he had fled with the maiden from the demons who again had her in their power. It seemed a long time to look back to, although it was little over four months; but in these four months, the girl, who was then to him but a beautiful and interesting stranger, had become to him dear as a sister—ay, dearer!

The air was cold, and felt still chillier from contrast with the warmth of the squire's kitchen. The hardy ranger thought nothing of it, but Caleb, who was sensitive to the weather, felt his hopes sink with the temperature. After about two hours' careful picking of the way through the wild chiaroscuro of the moonlit forest, Old Hickory drew rein, and whispered to the others to dismount. In a moment, Caleb's feet and hands, which had been cold, were burning with excitement; his courage leaped to the trial; it seemed to him then, as if all things were possible.

"We've got a good two mile to foot it," whispered the leader, "but I don't want these pesky brutes no nearer. They'd be sure to make a noise. We'll hitch 'em here and go forward."

The horses were tied; and the men proceeded through a wilderness so dense and overrun with bushes, that it seemed impossible to force a passage. However, the hunter, either through much sagacity, or through familiarity with the place, always contrived to find an accessible path through which to creep forward; and, after a slow journey of another hour, they approached the ravine, into which they now entered with redoubled caution. With the same expedients which he would have used had he been on the track of Indians, Old Hickory led the van, creeping from bush to bush, sliding from tree to tree, until, in perfect silence, he

had reached a spot distant about twenty yards from the mouth of the cavern, and from which he could bear full upon it with his rifle.

There was no doubt but that the Harpes had returned to this den, for he observed, with joy, the same horses he had discovered on the previous day, lying in an open patch not far away. This fact he communicated in a whisper to his companions, whom he placed on either side of him, and about ten feet from him, behind thick clumps of bushes, which were admirable as completely concealing them, yet giving them full opportunity to reconnoiter the mouth of the cave, between the branches. He pointed out to them the exact place in the rock, where the entrance, partially hidden by overhanging rocks and bushes, was to be found, directing them to rest their rifles in such a manner as to be in range, and yet so as not to weary themselves. He then took up a position midway between the two, where a fallen tree, by the side of which grew up some tall, rank grass, gave him not only a perfect concealment, but enabled him to move a few feet either way, so as to communicate with his aids as occasion required.

It now began to grow quite light. Never did it seem so long between the first gray ray of dawn and the final uprolling of the sun, as it did, that morning, to Caleb. Yet after the sun was risen, the time went even more slowly, to his intense, excited wish.

If expectation of the most vivid kind had not held them spellbound, their position would have been inexpressibly tedious, compelled to watch and wait so long in motionless silence.

The sun was two hours high. The black knelt, like an ebony statue, as patient as if there was no life in him; Caleb had begun to find the restraint intolerable. Earnestly as he had been warned, he was about to attempt to creep over toward the hunter, when, of a sudden, his heart leaped and fell—stood still, and bounded again. He saw a moss-grown log, which lay before the cave, slowly pushed aside, and a man, in a stooping posture, coming through, and standing, finally, erect, outside the retreat, look all about him, as if with the caution of habit. Involuntarily his finger pressed the lock, for the fellow's breast was in full range, but he remembered the counsel of the ranger not to shoot until both the brothers appeared, and refrained. This, then, was one of the Harpes!—one of those monsters, so much worse than wild beasts, as man's ingenuity enables him to accomplish more cruelty. The morning sun shone full on him, as he stood there, a large, spare man, dressed in the leather breeches and flannel "warmus" of the foresters. Caleb shuddered as the man's small and deep-set eyes turned hither and thither with a crafty and cautious look. His large mouth showed his long teeth, glistening like those of a wolf, and giving to all his other features an expression of beast-like ferocity. Oh, to think that Bella was in the power of that creature! Caleb breathed hard, setting his own teeth firmly together, as if, in imagination, he ground his enemy to powder. The man, after standing two minutes looking about him, gave a hitch to his breeches, and started to look after the horses, which were quietly cropping the grass, tied, as he had left them.

He had not gone a dozen steps when he paused, looked in the direction of the hidden foe, began to whistle carelessly, but at the same time to retreat, and was soon back in the cave.

As soon as he had disappeared, the ranger began to crawl toward Caleb, along the line of the fallen tree, until he came within whispering distance.

"King, draw in your rifle a little—so, very keeful. I mistrust that feller saw suthin' suspicious. In fact, I'm e'en a'most sartin of it, from the way he backed down. He was mighty cool about it—whistlin' and takin' it easy—but I'm afraid he saw something. Most likely the sun may have struck on the muzzle or lock of yer rifle, and he see'd it shine. If so, it'll be some time afore we see 'em out ag'in, and all our hopes of takin' 'em by surprise is over."

"Oh, dear, I'm confounded tired," whispered Caleb. "I wish I'd shot the villain when I had a chance."

"Never say die, young man. Why! I'd lay low for a bar longer'n this, and not tucker out—and here you ar', with a pretty gal—"

"That's just it! It kills me to bear the suspense."

"Wal, now, you keep yer cool and very still, and very sharp watch. Ef they're convinced they're watched, they'll be purty sure to dash out."

"Are you certain there is no back exit to that infernal cave?" asked Caleb. "It would be a

pretty joke to stay here like three fools, while they make off in some other direction."

"A cat couldn't get out o' that cave, except by the way they went in. I know it, all over. They might, p'raps, crawl through the hole I use for a chimney, but that comes out just atop o' that rock, and you kin keep your eye on it. They'd be wuss off, to come out thar, than by the nat'ral entrance—kase it's further from their horses, and it's just as exposed." The hunter turned to crawl back to his place, remarking: "Keep yer eyes skinned, young man—I can't abide to lose the game, after it's fairly holed."

CHAPTER VI.

OLD HICKORY'S STRATEGY.

ANOTHER long and weary watch now began. Hunger, thirst, but most of all, impatience, tormented the besieging trio. The sun mounted higher and higher, until it stood at its meridian.

The ranger was thoroughly convinced that the man who came out in the morning had seen some cause for suspicion, or they certainly would have been out again, to attend to their animals, if not to procure food for themselves. It now became his fear that they would remain in the cave until evening, and then effect their escape—which he would have no power to prevent, unless it were by the three closing up around the mouth of the cavern, so close as to be aware of the slightest movement, and thus to grasp their prey in the dark.

He now regretted that he had not brought a larger force with him, the idea having struck him that if he could leave a sufficient force in the front, he himself might creep, by a wide circuit, quite to the base of the rocks, crawl along to a position over the chimney of the cave, through which, come to think well of it, he might take aim at one of the skulkers, and thus drive the other to fight by the door where he could be easily shot down. He thought of this so favorably that at last he crept to Brutus, and laid the plan before him; asking him if he and King would be certain to do justice to the rascal in front, or to both, if they should suddenly emerge, while he was making his way to the rear. The negro's face glistened with satisfaction at the proposition; he was getting tired and uneasy—and change seemed desirable.

Old Hickory then proceeded toward Caleb, and made his intention known to him, after which he began to back out carefully down the little hillock, across the top of which they were ranged.

Hardly had he taken two paces backward when a little flash of fire and wreath of blue smoke suddenly burst from the entrance of the cave, and, simultaneously with the report of a gun, Caleb clapped his hand to his shoulder, and gave a slight shudder, but no sound.

The next instant all was silence—not a person was to be seen—one of the men in the cave had evidently fired from under shelter at the bush which had alarmed him, to ascertain whether his suspicions were correct or not. That was the moment which proved Caleb King, if not as much of a woodsman, as much of a hero, as the ranger. He seemed to know by intuition what was intended, and, although severely wounded, never stirred or moaned, after that first clapping of his hand to the wound.

"That's glorious!" whispered Old Hickory, fired by his conduct into enthusiasm. "Don't stir! keep quiet if you kin! We'll have 'em now. Yes! we'll have 'em! When they find that nothin' moves, they'll venture' out purty soon, and ther's still two of us, which is enough. But I hope yer ain't seriously hurt, young man."

"I'm bleeding pretty fast, I'm afraid," murmured Caleb, but he kept on his knees, although growing very white.

Presently he sunk a little forward, but not enough to stir the bushes, and the ranger saw that he had fainted.

"I can't reach him to stop the bleedin' without thur diskiverin' thar's somethin' in the wind. If he dies I can't help it," muttered he, gritting his teeth; "it'll be one more murder to their account—but if I don't wipe it out afore dark this day, Old Hickory 'll give up that he ain't wuth a b'arskin any longer."

Here he noticed the negro, who was terribly excited, fairly writhing upon his knees in the anxiety he felt about the young master; but at a motion from the hunter, he forced himself into his old quietude, and fixed his glaring eyes upon the den with an expression which boded ill for its inmates.

Fifteen minutes, which seemed at least twice that length of time, crept on, and the patience of the besiegers was about to be rewarded, for

already they saw a hand, containing a rifle, stretch out from the cave, when, at that moment, Caleb, reviving from his swoon, but totally unconscious of where he was or what he was doing, staggered to his feet, and fell down again. The besieged evidently saw him, for the arm was quickly drawn in—as quickly did the ranger jerk the young man out of the bushes, behind the safer barricade of the fallen tree. He then motioned to Brutus also to come into the shelter of the log, who did so. One great advantage remained to the outsiders, which was, that the enemy being ignorant of their position and numbers, would not know how to conduct an attack; but then, the besieged had this advantage—one man could defend their stronghold against a hundred, if he had some one to load guns for him; or even, for that matter, with a knife.

For a short time, while Brutus held watch of the cave, Old Hickory busied himself attending to King, who sadly needed some assistance. Tearing the shirt from his wounded shoulder, he bandaged the wound as well as he was able, stopping the bleeding with lint hastily scraped from the victim's cambric handkerchief. Then he poured a little whisky from his canteen down the patient's throat, and left him to rest and recover himself as best he might on the grass. Brutus, with one eye pityingly bent on his young master, and one sternly on the stronghold of the enemy, was a picture worth seeing. The day was a fine one, calm and bright as the preceding evening had been stormy. The ranger only wished there had been a "right smart breeze" to cover some of the movements he wished to make—but not a leaf stirred; the sun was already beginning to decline.

"See hyer, I can't stand this no longer. I'm going to get a peep at 'em from the chimney—they won't show their heads ag'in, now, be sure—they'll wait till dark. You've got two rifles, darkey, and I reckon you'll know how to use 'em in case them rascals shows afore I get back."

"Don't need to tell dis chile what to do with 'em weepings, if he only coteh de chance. Oh, Lordy, if dey would only come out."

"But they won't—they know better. If they've got fodder, thar's no reason why they should n't stay thar a week or a month—cept by smokin', which would be too dangerous for the gal. Wal, look sharp now."

The negro grunted an assent, and the ranger, slipping down into the long grass, where a slight eminence shielded him from sight, crawled along on his hands and knees, until Brutus lost sight of him entirely. He drew his own and his master's weapon to his hand, and turned himself to watch the cavern. In the mean time King had partially revived, and attempted to get into a kneeling posture beside the servant, but the pain in his shoulder was so severe that he sunk back again.

The negro was absorbed watching the entrance, while Caleb was too much taken up with the intense anxiety of the present to take heed of those last words. Moment after moment glided away in suspense—nothing was to be seen or heard, betokening life in that little hollow, except the movement of the tethered horses, as they nipped the grass, in a circle about their stake. After tedious waiting, Brutus finally saw something stirring along the brow of the rock which rose fifteen or eighteen feet above the cave. The next moment the tall form of the ranger arose to its full height, and he began to pick his way to a lower rock which he had pointed out as containing the chimney, or opening into the cave.

The negro watched him with breathless interest. Getting down on his hands and knees, Old Hickory crept along the rock, carrying his rifle carefully, until he seemed to have gained the desired spot, for he paused and began to bring his weapon to an aim.

"Now's the time," thought Brutus, "fur me to wing 'em, as dey break cover," and he, too, brought his rifle so as to command the door.

Just then another little wreath of blue smoke curled up out of the chimney. Brutus saw the smoke, but heard no noise, for the thick walls of the cave shut in the "crack" of the rifle. The ranger jumped very suddenly to his feet—so suddenly, and with such a queer gesture, that the negro, whose sense of the ridiculous was, at times, troublesome, burst into a low, gurgling "Hi! hi! hi!"

"Oh, golly, massa, I's afeard it's all up now with Ol' Hickory. Dey's done gone and shoot at him tru' de chimney."

"That's laughin' matter, is it?"

"Yer oughter see him jump—reckon ye'd larf, too, Massa King. Howsomever, I didn't mean to larf—I don't feel a bit like larkin', only

sometimes it jes' takes me like de wind catches a tree an' shakes it. Oh, Lordy, I never feel less like larkin' in my born days. He's cuttin' back, Massa King—he's cuttin' back—so I guess he ain't sewerely used up, like you are."

Again poor Caleb tried to raise himself; but the effort caused his wound to bleed afresh, and presently he had swooned entirely away again.

"Dis am abominable," groaned Brutus, witnessing the catastrophe, but not daring to drop his rifle in this emergency. "Massa King will die, sartain sure. Dis am de mos' misablum day ole Brutus eber knew, yet—and he's lived a good many."

In a short time the ranger, who had disappeared from the face of the cliff, was seen wriggling through the grass on his way back to his first cover.

"It beats natur'!" he broke forth as soon as he came alongside the negro, "how them imps keep watch. They've been too quick for us, so far. I expect, as I leaned forrad to look down the chimney, that I cast a shadder, which they no sooner sees than they up and fire at it, just to see what's the matter. 'Twas altogether the narrest escape I've had lately. Do you see my cap? The ball took the ha'r off, and a little off my head, too, I reckon. Of course, thar is no use comin' at 'em in that direction, arter this. Hallo! King's gone off the handle ag'in, has he? I tell you, now, that young man will die, if he ain't got out o' this."

"We can't give up till we get de young mis-sus, sar."

"Of course not. Who speaks of givin' up? But suthin's got to be done, and that right quick. It's three o'clock now, and more. I reckoned wrong for once in my life, that I didn't bring more help. Yer see, I wanted the glory of trappin' them vermin. I tell you what it is, boy, you'll have to go back to the settlement and return 'fore dark. What you've got to do is this. Get that young man back to the square's, whar he can be 'tended to. Yer strong and willin'—jest take him on yer back, and crawl off till out o' sight—then sling him over yer shoulder and make for the bosses. When you find them, put him across one—you want t'other—and get along as fast as you can."

"'Twon't be bery fast, massa—dat so. Massa King can't bear no fast ridin'—have to walk dem bosses."

"I'm afeard of it. But he'll sartainly die if he don't have attention soon. So, off with him—get into the main road as soon as possible. Try and get back afore night, or I'll have to finish up this business without yer help. And bring a bit of fodder in yer pockets, if it's handy." All this the hunter uttered, without taking his eyes from the cave—and not even when he heard the negro crawling away with his moaning burden, did he look around.

Finally, as the silence deepened about him, Old Hickory felt that he was all alone. In that wild region it would not have been strange if a passing bear or Indian should have broken upon his monotony, and placed him between two fires. If such a crisis had arrived, he would not have been daunted. He was made of stern stuff—the day's fasting and fatigue, following upon a sleepless night of exposure and exertion, had not yet begun to tell upon his iron frame—his eye flashed its blue fire as keenly as ever. His most eager hope was that the brothers would make their appearance while he alone was left to confront them.

No such good luck was likely to happen; and as he shifted his weight from one knee to the other, and lay down on his breast to rest himself, all the time watching and waiting, his mind was busy about the evening's work—whether the darkness would allow them to creep up to the cavern's entrance, and grasp the men as they ventured out, or whether the brothers would get the best of it. He doubted not that one or the other of the two was constantly on guard, and would detect the slightest movement, and be fully prepared for an attack. To close about the cave with a number of men, and so starve the marauders into submission by an unceasing siege of days, would have been a plausible plan, had not the girl been with them to suffer, and, of course, the first to sink under privation. It would not do to starve her, certainly—it would be better, even, to let her captors go. Pondering over all these things, Old Hickory's thoughts were suddenly interrupted.

Much to his astonishment, he saw the gleam of something blue at the opening—the log which guarded it was pushed back, and the girl herself was thrust forward into full view. It did not take the old hunter long to read this strategy.

"Blast thur skulkin', cowardly souls," he muttered, thur gwine to use the gal for a kiver—"

and sure enough one of the Harpes stepped out behind her, and held her up as a shield before him, looked hard in all directions, and began to chirrup to the horses. Then he spoke to some one inside and the other brother appeared, both lurking behind the girl, and gliding along the base of the rock. It evidently was their object to reach their horses. The creature who held the girl in his brawny arm kept up a see-saw motion as he ran, which made it impossible to shoot without danger to her. Passing the base of the rock, the bushes and trees would be so thick as to allow them every facility for evading danger. In fifteen or twenty running leaps they were into the covert, signaling their horses to follow, while they stooped and dodged and ran. It did not take the ranger long to decide on one step. His gun was a double-barreled one, and he had, besides, King's rifle. He knew the men were well armed, probably with pistols as well as rifles. But if he could place them on a footing with himself, he would attempt the odds of two to one. The girl had not struggled or screamed, nor made any resistance, as she was held up to shield her abductors. Old Hickory only noticed that she looked pale and stunned.

The horses must have been under good control, for they immediately started after their masters. This was the ranger's opportunity. Two shots of the double-barrel, following so close upon each other as to seem almost like one, sent one of the horses rolling upon the grass in death-struggles, and the other flying, wounded and limping, off in the woods.

The Harpes set up a defiant yell, and disappeared in the thicket, with their victim.

"Now I've got 'em on equal terms," muttered Old Hickory, and in a moment he, too, was "covered" by a tree, and was dodging, stooping, and pursuing his enemies. He had only waited to reload his gun—but when he came upon the spot where they had entered the wood, a trace of them was lost. That, as soon as possible, they would break from the woods, steal somebody's horses, and be off, he had no doubt. It was highly important, then, that he should keep the trail, and come up with them before dark. Skilled in Indian warfare, he had no difficulty in the pursuit; all he had to look out for was an ambush—and this, as they did not know whether they were followed by one or twenty, it was not probable they would attempt.

CHAPTER VII. ON THE TRAIL.

THE astonishment of Brutus, when he returned a little after sunset, and found no Old Hickory upon the ground, was intense. He brought with him four hunters, whom he had encountered in the woods, and who were eager to join in the hunt after the dreaded Harpes. King had been sent on to the squire's, with word to the family of how matters stood at that time. After cautious reconnoitering, nothing could be discovered of the ranger. One comfort was, that his body was not to be found. The dead horse gave some clew to what had been transpiring. It fully convinced Brutus that the Harpes had fled, and that Old Hickory was after them. He therefore ventured to enter the cave. There was just light enough to show that it was deserted. A pile of hemlock bushes, a blanket, and the remains of food, looked as if it had been occupied at least several days.

"If Hick's arter 'em, he'll get 'em—that's all," remarked one.

"Oh, Lordy," whimpered Brutus, "why couldn't I 'a' been along? I'd liked no better fun and now I've got to miss it! Who's a better right dan dis chile to look arter de welfar' of his own dear young missus? It's right down mean for Old Hickory to go off widout lettin' me know!"

"But, of he'd stopped for that, I reckon you'd 'a' lost your missus, nigger, sure. So stop whimperin', and look about. We may have a hand in the fun, yet. Hoorah! let's look for the trail."

The whole five were soon on the track of it; but it was now too dark to follow. There was nothing to do but to trust the Harpes to Old Hick, and to camp out where they were now, so as to be on their way with the first dawn of day. The cave being the driest, they resolved to take up their abode in it.

In the morning, as early as five o'clock, the little band were out in the woods, tracking the path left by the four persons who had preceded them on the previous night.

How had the night passed with Old Hick? Knowing that not more than two good hours of

daylight were left to him, and that, if the Harpes got clear of the woods in the night, their escape would be easy and certain, he pressed forward, resolved that the girl should be rescued, and that the brothers should perish by his rifle. Excited as he was, and nerved to the highest tension of muscle and brain, he did not realize that he was upon the eve of one of the most extraordinary adventures of his life.

He had gone forward for some time; already the declining sun threw his "golden arrows" through the trees, almost on a level with the horizon. He had just picked up a comb, such as women wear, which had either dropped from the girl's hair, or been thrown down on purpose to arrest attention, when he heard, so far before him in the wood that the sound was faint as an echo, a woman's scream. Then two shots were fired in rapid succession; and while he was puzzling his brains as to what it meant, a huge bear rushed out of the underbrush, coming directly toward him. The animal was wounded, and in a towering rage. Although sure of his rifle, the ranger did not care to engage with bruin at that critical time. He would rather rescue Miss Bella than slay all the bears in Kentucky. But Fate was obstinate. The bear saw him and came at him, furiously.

Hick raised his rifle, but lowered it again. "If I fire on the brute, they will hear me, and will pause to reconnoiter—at least, it will give them a warning of my whereabouts. I shouldn't like three beasts upon me at once. No, mister b'ar, it's got to be a hand-to-hand tussle, I see."

So muttering, he dropped his two rifles, and, drawing his huge knife, fell upon his knee, and awaited the onset. As the beast sprang upon him, he plunged his weapon into its shoulder; but its claws were fastened into his shirt and flesh, and the two rolled over together. The hunter came up at the top, and again drew his knife, which had been wrenched from his hand, and was sticking in the wound, and drove it again and again into the brute's flesh. The bear had hold of his leg with his mouth, and would not be forced to release it by the pain of the wounds, while the hunter was in such a position that he could not strike at the animal's heart or eyes. It was at this moment that a shot whizzed by his ears. He comprehended instantly that the Harpes had returned to see what had become of the bear, and were rejoiced in this opportunity to put an end to a worse enemy than bruin. Quick as thought he again rolled over, bringing the bear between him and his adversaries. A second shot, designed more for him than the animal, pierced the bear's heart, riddled the ranger's jacket, but left him unharmed.

The fierce clasp of the savage monster slowly relaxed—the brave man felt himself free, although scratched and bleeding. Still somewhat sheltered by the bear, he cast his eyes about to see the exact locality of his rifles. Then, with nice calculation, he suddenly rose, made one bound, and was behind a tree, his weapon in his hand. Two more shots whistled harmlessly past.

He felt, now, that, although one against two, the best of the fight was in his own hands. A series of maneuvers now commenced.

The Harpes, convinced that but one person was on their track, seemed to resolve upon revenge for the trouble he had made them. In attempting to make a circuit, so as to come in his rear and front at the same time, one of them exposed himself incautiously for five seconds, and the quick rifle of the ranger did not miss the opportunity. The man fell, apparently severely wounded. The other only waited for the fast-increasing darkness to protect him, when he darted off like a deer, the girl flung across his shoulder. It was impossible to fire while she was in that position; again she served as a shield to her abductor.

Smarting and lame from his contest with the bear, Old Hickory gave chase, furious at the trick which prevented him from firing.

At last, in the gathering gloom, the fugitive stumbled, staggered, fell, dragging the girl down with him; but almost instantly she was upon her feet, and flew, with lightning speed, back, toward the ranger, who, she knew, was near, though it was already so dark that she did not see him.

"Tree, gal, tree!" shouted Hickory.

She sprang to one side, as a pistol-shot whizzed past her. The warning of the ranger barely saved her. Not pausing to see whether his fire had taken effect or not, the ruffian again dashed forward.

"Let bim go," muttered Old Hickory. "I did hope to make sure of him, and I will yet,

arter I've seen you safe home, miss. I guess the other is done fur, anyhow."

It was a sore trial to the ranger to leave the bear he had boxed with so handsomely without taking the fellow's skin; but, he consoled himself for this, as well as for the escape of the murderers, by resolving to return in the morning, with a band of friends, and scour the country far and wide. It was now so dark that the girl had to cling to her preserver in order not to lose him. As he had no guide, except the stars, which he could not always see, he was compelled, after trudging back for two or three miles, to camp for the night. The cold and darkness were both unpleasant and dangerous; he was very sorry for the trembling girl, whom he could feel shivering, as she clung to his arm. He resolved to have a fire, quite certain that the Harpes would take no backward steps. Should they do so, he was far off the track by which they came. They descended a hill, and at its base Hickory found a ravine which would quite effectually conceal the light of the fire from observation. He then drew forth his tinder-box, struck a spark into some dry leaves, and soon had a brisk little flame, and then a cheerful fire. He seated his charge before it, while he looked about for water, which he knew he should find somewhere in the hollow; for he was, as he expressed it, "pretty nigh tuckered out," being thirsty, hungry, and smarting from the hug of bruin. Fortunately his tough leather breeches had sustained the chief fury of the bear's onslaught, by which means he escaped any very deep or dangerous scratch. When he had washed his wounds carefully, wet his head, and drank some water, he felt better.

Gathering some hemlock-boughs for his companion, and heaping the fire well with such fuel as he could find, he prepared his weapons for use, in case of necessity, and bidding his companion sleep, promised, to keep guard over her. For some hours neither of them slept, but fatigue gradually won the mastery over prudence, and both sunk into slumber.

The earliest bird startled them to their feet; and thus it was that the re-enforcements had no more than started out, that morning, when they met the triumphant hunter with his prize.

Brutus came running up and began a series of leaps and dances about the couple, then suddenly cast himself on his knees before his young mistress, caught her gown and kissed it, jumped up, and almost looked seriously savage, as he cried:

"It war right 'down mean of you, Massa Hickory, for to send me off le way you did, jis' for to go and reap all de glory, an' not let ole Brutus do nuffin' for de salvation of his own missus. For she is my own missus, so she is, an' I'll prove it. Oh, Lordy! what for you let dat man be a-rescuing you? Didn't you know I was a-comin'?"

"I didn't care to wait," said Bella; and despite her trials, she laughed at the absurdity of the idea. "I was very glad to take the first help that came to hand," and she gave the ranger such a look out of her dark eyes that he felt well repaid for all his efforts in her behalf.

"We're both of us on the p'int of starvation," said the hunter; "so if you rely car' for your missus, darkey, just fly around and git us some breakfast. Be quick about it, too, for I want these chaps to jine me in huntin' down them human painters."

Brutus had come prepared for just such an emergency, and produced bread and dried meat from one of the capacious pockets of his jacket.

While the two were eating, Old Hick laid out his plans, which were, first, for Brutus to take the horses he had brought and convey Bella safely to the squire's; secondly, that he and his little band of hunters should start after the Harpes.

"Tell the squire and young King to rest easy in thar minds," was the ranger's parting injunction to the two, as they started homeward; "one o' them villains is already hurt or killed, and we don't intend to come back till we find t'other."

CHAPTER VIII.

BRUTUS AND HIS MYSTERY.

"LAWS, didn' Massa Hick tell you Massa King was hurt bad?" exclaimed the servant, as he rode beside Bella, noticing that she nearly fell from her horse when he chanced to mention the circumstance of his injury.

"No, he told me nothing."

"He was hit wid dat fust shot dem rascals fired; de shot took him in de shoulder. When I took him off he fainted dead away, an' I'm afraid he's in a bad way, but mebbe not so ser'us, arter all," he added, as her face turned

slowly pale, until every vestige of color faded out of it.

"Can't we go a little faster, Brutus? Can't we hurry more?" was all she said from that time forward until they came in sight of the squire's. Once there, she leaped from her horse, her face still as white as a sheet.

"She do lub dat young man sorboringly, no mistake," mused Brutus. "I hope he'll do wot's right. Ef he does, it'll be good news for him, I kin tell him. But, he shan't know wot I know till I see wot stuff he's made of—that's so!" and the negro hastened after Miss Bella.

As she leaped from her horse, the door flew open and Mrs. Claiborne had her in her arms, laughing, crying, and squeezing her; and then the squire came flying out, as if twenty years younger, and the servants, little and big, gathered about; but, in the midst of all the joyous confusion, exclamations, questions, the girl grew paler and more quiet. Until one fact was known, she could not respond to these hearty welcomes.

"She's skeered and tired to death—that's it!" exclaimed the cook. "Let's take her in, missus, and make some coffee, and nuss her up."

But Brutus knew what was struggling at her heart, and asked her question for her.

"How's Massa King, dis mornin', missus? We's berry anxious 'bout him."

Mrs. Claiborne's bright countenance grew a shade more grave.

"Wal, the doctor's seen him and got the ball out, and thinks he'll get along; but, he's quite bad to day. I think the worrying has made him more feverish, but I hope he'll get along better now. Come in, child, and show yourself to him; that will be the best medicine in the world for him."

Trembling, the girl followed into the best bedroom, where, on the couch, his eyes glittering with fever, and his face quite changed and pale, lay Caleb. He had heard the noise in the hall, and was looking with unutterable eagerness at the door. When he saw who entered it, a cry of joy escaped his lips, and he held out one weak hand. For a moment Bella gazed at him, striving to master herself; but, the self-control of the polished world was not hers, and after an instant's struggle, she darted forward, dropped on her knees beside the bed, and burst into tears.

"There, there, child, you're just done over," said the matron, with womanly tact. "Come, and lie down, in my room;" and she led the girl away, to compose herself in solitude, while Brutus expatiated, to his heart's content, on the incidents of her rescue, as he had them from Old Hickory.

For a few days Mrs. Claiborne had her hands full. Bella was so exhausted by exposure and mental distress, that, vigorous as was her constitution, she was obliged to keep her bed for a day or two. Caleb, also, was seriously ill; his fever ran high, and his prostration proved to be extreme. But, the cool weather, his previous good health, the lady's excellent medicaments and nursing, brought him out of real danger in a few days. To better all things, and make his convalescence one long season of happiness, Bella had quite recovered from her temporary illness, and had been established in his room as deputy-nurse.

Caleb no longer regretted his wound; all that he desired was to get well enough to take advantage of the Indian-summer weather to return to the East. He could not endure the prospect of remaining the winter in Kentucky, or of allowing Bella to do so; for the Harpes, despite the promise of the ranger, had succeeded, as usual, in making their escape, and the young man never felt, for a moment, that the object of their search was safe. Old Hickory and his band, after three weeks of pursuit, abandoned the game for the present. But they established a sort of vigilance committee, which would render it extremely dangerous for the brothers to venture into that vicinity. What the fate of the wounded one had been they could not discover; though they conjectured, from the marks left about the place where he fell, that his brother had returned and carried him off, for they saw no traces of his having been buried thereabouts.

Caleb long had been aware that he loved the nameless and uneducated orphan; but, his pride had struggled against his love. Her danger, and his own illness, changed all this. He decided upon the course which both passion and honor called upon him to pursue—to betroth himself, with Mrs. Claiborne's approval; to ask her to carry out her plan of making one of the traveling party back to the East; and to assist him there in placing his affianced in some suitable

school, to remain at least a year before their marriage should be consummated. The education of girls in those days was not so varied as at present, and, despite her associations, there was about Bella, as we have said, the air and manner of a lady. Her quick wit, with small aid, would soon teach her those things in which she was deficient, while, as for natural beauty and grace, she would be a queen anywhere.

So it happened one lovely day, about a month after the accident, that Caleb, standing with Bella by the gate, looking at the sunset, was inspired to say something to her which called up a crowd of blushes, and sent the glance of those wild, shy eyes wandering everywhere but upon his face. It was the first time he had been out of his room, and the delight of being again in the open air had broken down the barriers of doubt and reserve, and let out all the rush and tumult of his feelings. When they walked back to the house, the observing Brutus began to roll his eyes and chuckle.

"It's all right, now. Reckon I see dem roses on Miss Bella's cheeks, and Massa King as proud as a peacock! It's high time ole Brutus shouldn't distress hisself no longer, keepin' a secret, which has most bu'st him open ebery day for five months."

The approval of the squire and his wife was not withheld upon the arrangements of the young couple. Brutus was summoned, and had listened quietly to all that was said to him; but when the orders for preparation for the journey were finished, he asked:

"But where is I gwine to ride, Massa Claiborne? Shall I sot on de carriage and drive, or shal I take black Nance, and ride along fur a guard, yer know?"

"Why, you ain't going. Who said any thing about your going?" cried the squire.

"Of course I must go long wid my own missus," said the negro, doggedly. "Sorry I can't b'long to you any more, square, for yer a kind massa, but, I's Miss Bella's nigga, now."

"Hol ho! ho!" roared the squire; "has Miss Bella been a-buying you, without my consent? No, Mister King, no such tricks! I gave a thousand dollars for Brutus, and I wouldn't take fifteen hundred. Can't spare him!"

"I've said nothing to Brutus," answered Caleb, in surprise.

"Nobody hain't said nothing to me," continued the negro, intensely enjoying the sensation he was creating. "I've known all along, ebersince de day Miss Bella sot her foot in dis yere house, dat I b'longed to her, and nobody else, shuah!"

For weeks, Brutus had been full of hints and exclamations, which had more than once excited the curiosity of his hearers. As he had said to himself, "he was bu'stin' with his secret," and a drop or two of it would occasionally leak out.

"Miss Bella," he said, turning to her, "do you 'member dat time w'en I asked yer 'bout yer name—if yer could 'call de name of Moultrie?—and how I ast yer 'bout de plantation, and yer seemed to 'member more'n yer eber did afore?"

"Yes, Brutus, it's all grown quite plain to me lately. I remember my old home so well that I should know it, should I see it again."

"Dat's de talk. I'll lighten yer understandin'! It's de power of 'sociation, Miss Bella. It's livin' alongside o' me has helped yer mem'ry."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she answered, staring at him in self-amazed perplexity.

"Yer don't purtend, Miss Bella, dat yer name isn't Moultrie?" said the negro, stepping into the full light, and looking intently at her—"and dat yer don't know yer father's own coachman. Brutus, dat carried yer to mammy Dinah dat day yer tore yer pretty red frock on de nail, and cried so hard 'bout it, and mammy sewed it nice, so it didn't show? Yer don't forget de day we found de hen's nest togedder, and mammy baked yer de poun'-cake? Lorse, Miss Bella, yer knows Brutus too well to forget him!"

She gazed at him, like one upon whom a spell was working, a light coming over her face, a new memory awakening in her eyes. She stood a full minute after he had finished, while he looked at her appealingly; then she sprang forward and threw herself into his great arms, like a little child, sobbing out:

"Brutus! Brutus!"

"Does yer know me, honey?" he asked, stroking her hair, and then setting her down on her feet, and holding her off to watch her face.

"I know you well; I remember all."

"An' yer understand why I ast so many foolish questions dis summer? I was a-tryin' of you, Miss Bella. Fur my own part, I was sartin who you was de fust time I heard of you, and see'd you, but I wanted to convince dese oders—and

yerself, honey. I wanted yer recollecshun to come back by degrees. Besides," he added, with a sly look at Caleb, "I wanted to see wedder dis young gentlem'n liked Mass Bella first rate for herself. I says to myself, 'Lorion, Brutus, and see if he's willin' to take her as she is,' for, if he was, den he'd be de berry one to desave to I arn dat he was a-marrying of de greatest heiress in Ole Virginny."

"For the Lord's sake," exclaimed Mrs. Claiborne, fairly trembling, "don't keep us in suspense any longer—tell your story, and tell it as short as possible."

Brutus pulled his wool, rolled his eyes around, and began:

"Yer reckollek, Massa Claiborne, yer buy'd me of de heir of de Moultrie estate, in Ole Virginny, as you was comin' out to settle, 'bout seven year ago. Wal, don't yer reckollek what I often tol' you, 'bout dese times, what had happened to our family, sah? Dea we was one of de fust families, and de Moultries had but one chile, a daughter, and de fadder and mudder were both murdered one night, and de chile either stole or killed? Nobody ever found de chile, or who killed de parents."

"Why, yes, I recall it all now," broke in the squire; "but I declar' I never thought of it when I heard her story."

"Word was sent to the relatives in Norf Carolina, and de next heir-at-law, he come up and took possession; and all our hearts was mos' broke, fer we lubbed de massa and missus, and de dear little chile. De new massa, he sell off some of us, and I was among 'em who was sol'—and I come out here, and nebbor could hear no more 'bout de ole plantation. An' I allers grieved about it, night an' day. And when Massa King began to tell me 'bout dis chile, and wot she said, and how old she was, and how long she'd been stole, I guessed who it was, at once. Dat was what made me act so dat day. When I see'd her, den I know'd sure, for she's de pictur' of her mudder; and she's a Moultrie, sartain, sir—one de fust families Virginny, Massa King—and I'm gwine along fer a witness, fer she's worth t'ree hundred thousand dollars if she is a cent—dat's so!—an' dem relatives got to step out dat plantation. So you see, Massa Claiborne, I b'longs to Miss Bella, 'spite dat t'ousand dollars; but I guess missus is honest, and will defend de money."

The air of importance with which Brutus made his concluding suggestion was so ludicrous as to cause a laugh from his listeners, excited and amazed as they were.

"It's allers necessary fur to hab a name to git married wid," continued Brutus, undisturbed by the merriment; "so I introduces Miss Bella Moultrie to Massa King"—with a flourish. The betrothed girl turned upon her lover a glorious glance of joy, love, and exultation mingled. It certainly was delightful to learn that her name was an honored one, her birth as good as his, her fortune more than equal. Since he had taken her in her worst circumstances, how proud was she to be able to return his rich gifts!

That was a happy and busy family that night, for they sat up until almost morning, talking the matter over, and carefully eliciting all the proof which both Bella and Brutus could bring to establish her identity. The proof was perfectly satisfactory to those who heard it; and it was now decided that her claims should be put forward at once to the property so justly hers. Caleb was to take the whole party at once to Virginia, to establish Bella's rights; and when this was in a fair way of being accomplished, she was to find herself a home in some good school, until she felt prepared to assume the duties of her new and exalted station.

We have only to add that this programme was carried out successfully. The travelers got out of Kentucky in safety; the heiress, within one year, was acknowledged mistress of the Moultrie estates, and it was from the stately old family mansion that she stepped forth the morning she was made a bride.

What the object of the Harpes had been in sparing her, when they murdered her parents, and why they had brought her up as their own, remained always a mystery. Whether they hoped, through her, to ultimately gain possession of the vast Moultrie estates, or were simply instigated by some caprice of their lawless nature, cannot be asserted.

As for Old Hickory, he had many a perilous hunt after the hated brothers, but their cunning continued equal to their ferocity, and they escaped, unfortunately, the rifle of the ranger, to perish—history does not mention how. Their names are written in blood on the page of Kentucky's story.

THE END.

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